



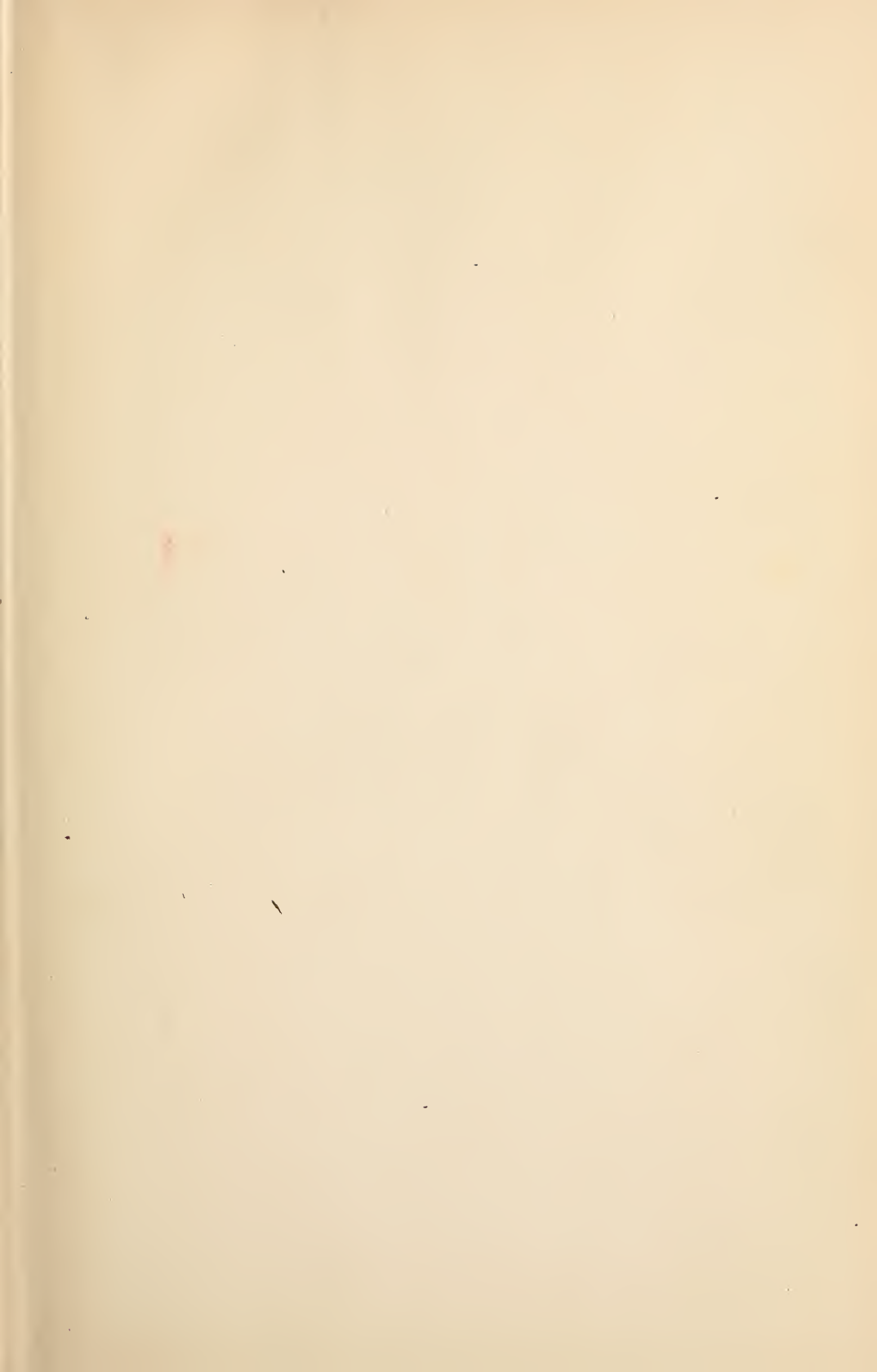


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# THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

DOCTRINE AND PRACTISE OF  
CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

BY

REV. WALTER ELLIOTT

*OF THE PAULIST FATHERS*

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# THE SPIRITUAL LIFE



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## I.

### HOLY RETIREMENT.

SILENCE is an asset capable of very diverse investment. One may be fond of silence and loneliness because he is stupid, or ignorant; or because he wishes to spite his friends—a sullen silence, grieving those whose happiness depends on his kind words. Perhaps it may be the shyness of a bashful spirit that makes us hold our peace—a form of human respect. But religious solitariness is that prayerful wisdom which finds the soul's best solace in conversing alone with God. "Imagine, in the simplicity of thy heart, that thou art out of the world with God, that thou art already in eternity, separated from the body, and no longer disturbed by the things of earth"—an exhortation of Blessed Albertus Magnus, which needs but a grammatical re-setting to become a definition of religious solitude.

Let us realize that it is God's plan to sanctify us one by one. Holiness is indeed imparted by the outward medium of the Sacraments, yet it is an inward process. Now, "silence is the conversation of the divinity, the language of the angels, the eloquence of heaven, the art of persuading God." So said de Rancé who had known all the joys and all the benefits of speech in his life in the world, and of silence in his life at La Trappe. Trust him with the scales for adjusting their relative value.

We cannot conceive of anyone acquiring an intimate love of God, or a deep grief for sin, except he be fond of spiritual retirement. Holy love and holy sorrow are fruit of the tree of solitude. Sanctification is no doubt a relationship of the soul to

its Maker many-sided and variously graded; but St. Teresa says that "it is a divine union, in which our Lord takes His delight in the soul, whilst the soul rejoices in Him" (*Way of Perfection*, ch. xvi., 4). We find the same doctrine everywhere in Tauler, who constantly preaches that it is good to be alone, and he ever and again reminds us that the search for divine things, nay for God Himself, is to be inward and not outward, except for the doing of good works and the great acts of our sacramental life. And even these divine external activities are meant to drive us inward to think and love in God's silent company. This it is that dignifies us, transforming us into "the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptibility of a quiet and a meek spirit, which is rich in the sight of God" (1 Peter iii. 4).

Yet, practically considered, one is often perplexed about the uses of reticence. Thus, when you begin to debate with yourself as to saying or not saying things, if it be a question of prudence you hold your peace, resisting the plea that your words may do some good. If you are perplexed on the score of charity, you hold your peace for Christ's sake, resisting the plea that your words may do no harm. If obedience lays its finger on your lips, surely you must hold your peace, resisting the plea that a little gabble is no great sin. If your inner monitor bids you hold your peace on the general principle that if "speech is silver silence is golden," then the goodness there is in merely holding one's peace, the gain there is in merely hushing up talk, must incline you to be still. On general principles incline to talk not, even to listen not. But our love of silence should readily yield up some good speech at the bidding of kindly manners and common sense. Meanwhile, and always, beware of petty scruples about the obligation of saying things. To an aspiring nature the company of one's lonely self is the atrium of the divine audience chamber. Blessed the man whose home, be it palace or cottage, is for some notable part of each day a veritable Thebaid. Of Thomas à Kempis we are told: "He was happier in his cell than out of it, and took little or no interest in the outside



world." Yet he wrote a little book for "the outside world," which heads the list of all books, big or little, next to Holy Writ. No one but a solitary could write a book which is the busy man's prayer book the world over. "Wisdom is drawn out of hidden places. It is hid from the eyes of all the living. God understandeth the way of it, and He knoweth the place thereof" (Job xxviii. 18, 21, 23).

No virtue is so difficult as humility, and to it no road is so straight as the meek path of silence. "I have set a guard to my mouth when the sinner stood against me; I was dumb, and was humbled, and kept silence from good things. . . . I was dumb and opened not my mouth, because Thou hast done it" (Ps. xxxviii. 2, 3, 10). After Job had poured out his soul to God in accents of complaint, surely the most touching in all literature, God answered him, and chided him for his rashness in debating his sorrows with the Most High. Upon which the holy man said: "What can I answer, who hath spoken inconsiderately? I will lay my hand upon my mouth" (Job xxxix. 34). Strive against speech in the day of trial, and thou shalt master the arrogant demon within thee. Learn the profit, no less than the sweetness, of the divine admonition: "Be still and see that I am God" (Ps. xlv. 11).

Oftentimes it is holy labor that charms us away from holy stillness, not seldom with the authority of justice, but just as often with the greed of a monopolist. Mark how Christ acted. Easter Sunday night, when the disciples were gathered together for fear of the Jews, panic-stricken fugitives, shut off from the chattering world, behind locked and bolted doors, the risen Jesus suddenly stood in the midst of them. In their deep retirement He breathed the Holy Ghost into their very souls, and said twice over: "Peace be unto you" (John xx. 19). O most affectionate greeting, bestowing the priceless boon of holy peace, coupled with the power to forgive sins! Mark, therefore, the worth of the fugitive state, and of shrinking with fear from a clamorous world. Mark, too, in the lives of holy men and

women, how when zeal draws them to labor for souls in the outward apostolate, a more positive zest and affection withdraws them (the earliest moment that duty permits) back to silence and prayer. A sensible preference for solitude and its spiritual exercises is the plainest mark of a calling for the busiest occupations of zeal—both a vocation and a promise of fruit. The right spirit is a great readiness for work after prayer, and a greater readiness for prayer after work.

How long did Jesus linger in Nazareth? Year followed year, and yet He lingered on—years submerged but not lost. Their power for active efficacy was like the sweetness of honey, so slowly gathered and stored, so quickly eaten. If Calvary teaches us to love death even for our enemies' sake, Nazareth's lesson is the divinity of silent waiting. Nazareth's thirty years are meaningless, if retirement from external labors for silent meditation, and the postponing of work for the sake of prayer, be a mistake. He Who is appointed to save the world by preaching, spends nearly His entire life in silent retirement from His auditory. Does this not prove that seeking God alone, or with only Mary and Joseph for company, is the truest fertilization of activity? O noble ambition—to choose many years of prayer with a view to a few years of divine activity! O true paradox of zeal, which makes zeal for solitude the seed for the fruit of a tumultuous apostolate! In our earliest era it was shown that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." For every era the motto holds good that the martyrdom of obscurity is the seed-bed of heroism. "Love to be unknown and counted for nothing" says the *Imitation*, characterizing the novitiate of active teachers and preachers.

The object of a Retreat is "That you may walk worthy of God, in all things pleasing; being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. i. 10). By it you are to be introduced into an inner shrine, that like St. Anthony of the desert you may come forth "fully conversant with its mysteries, and instinct with God." Ages ago God gave

as His own definition of holiness, pointing to Himself as the motive: "You shall be holy, because I am holy" (Levit. xi. 46). Like Master like man. But the resemblance must be wrought out in prolonged and solitary companionship, such as a Retreat secures.

As a system of practical conduct, a devout life consists in "a familiar and easy habit of accompanying outward actions with attention to the divine presence" (Alban Butler on *St. Catherine de Ricci*). Emphasize "familiar and easy" in this definition. To the many, prayer is hard striving; to the chosen few, it is as easy as play. Note the date when resort to prayer first ranks among your relaxations of life; for this is decisive of spirituality; and also of perfect success in either prayer or work. During a Retreat the Spirit of God drills us into His inner discipline. Our faculties are schooled in the union of the outer and inner life of Christ. The outer life may easily be uncoupled from the inner motive, and action is only Christian when it proceeds from inspiration in some true meaning of the word.

Virtue may consist of occasional acts and transient moods of fervor, it is then the quality of ordinary souls. But when fervor dominates the soul, and its impulses become habitual both in affections and convictions, we have the spiritual temper known as perfection. Now fervor rightly understood is synonymous with silent dwelling with God; it is a meditative tendency. "For growth in virtue," says St. John of the Cross, "the important thing is to be silent and to work. Conversation distracts, silence and work bring recollection" (*Maxim* 295). Therefore when our Lord sent His disciples on their holy work, He said to them: "Salute no man by the way" (Luke x. 4). Their mission was to absorb them wholly, it was to occupy and preoccupy them. Who does not know that to maintain such self-restraint he needs the occasional discipline of Retreat?

A Retreat is also a season of penance, for true repentance

is shown by humble silence no less than by tearful pleading. "Thy words have I hidden in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee" (Ps. cxviii. 11), exclaims the royal penitent.

When Moses would approach God in the burning bush, he heard a voice saying: "Put off the shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Ex. iii. 5). In Retreat we draw near to God. Not only must the dust of everyday life be shaken off, but our shoes must be laid aside. The excursions of our imagination must be halted, our memory bridled. God's voice has preëmpted this holy mount. His fire burns in our hearts with pain for the past, so that pure hope may be found amid the cinders of all mundane delusions. Loosen your shoes; loosen and cast away every thought that is not of God: attend to God. He is within you, He enlightens, He absorbs, He heartens you.

Several spiritual advantages are to be had here not possible elsewhere, at least not with such concentrated influence. First, the silence of God, voluntary, religious, uniform in its strict observance; and day by day growing more eloquent of the true aim of life. Then the conferences, meditations, examens, the common offices and prayers. These are the outward words of God, spoken with the advantage of entire monopoly of sound. By them God purifies motives, dispells doubts, banishes faint-heartedness, gives zest for holy works, thrusts out low views of vocation, smooths irritability, and connects blind antipathies. The Retreat gives God fair play with the soul. Experience proves that when well done, it may compass the spiritual achievements of many years; and that, unquestionably, it adjusts the year that follows it to God's standards of perfection.

Hence it outranks other exercises of religion. Holy Church makes it an obligation in every religious community, and lavishes upon it her most precious indulgences. Thus the highest authority on earth withdraws the soul from perishable things to devote it to what is heavenly—leads it from the outer to the inner world. When duty calls us back again to the outer order,



we go with motives cleansed and forces renewed. A Retreat is made for the sake of more intimate union with God; it is made in the interests of our whole duty to God both external and interior. One sinks out of sight into the depths of his own heart where God awaits him; and finds employment in intercourse with the Deity. From it he comes forth full of zeal, patience, kindness, sympathy, with a quickened facility for placing the motives of Calvary at the root of all his conduct.

We go into Retreat in response to the invitation of Christ: "And He said to them: Come apart into a desert place and rest awhile. For there were many coming and going, and they had not so much as time to eat" (Mark vi. 31). Blessed the fatigue borne in company with the busy, wearied Savior; and yet more blessed the rest enjoyed in the company of the restful Savior. Let us now look for a new conversion to God, one that shall be absolute, final. Let us claim boundless graces for future labors, since we are devotedly giving ourselves up to the tranquility of God. Here shall we balance our lives equitably between the outer and the inner weight of purpose. As St. Leonard of Port Maurice expressed it: "My vocation is giving missions—and living in solitude."

How carefully should we safeguard this holy seclusion; observing all rules strictly; yet avoiding anxiety, knowing that we are now to rest quiet and give God a free hand. If we but keep our thoughts out of the world, God will quickly elevate them to heaven. "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready" (Ps. cvii. 2)—if we can honestly say that, the Retreat is already a success. Forget old scruples on the one hand, and detest self-sufficiency on the other. Away with worriments, discouragements. Assimilate the conferences, gently allow them to work out their conclusions in good resolutions, and pray God quietly but earnestly to make your besetting weakness more clearly manifest to you.

## II.

### GOD AND MY SOUL.

THE holy Emperor, St. Henry, on meeting St. Romuald, cried out: "I wish my soul were like thine." And we would say the same to our Savior. Made in our natural life in the likeness of the Father (Gen. i. 26), we are in our sanctification to be transformed into the image of the Son, "from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. iii. 18). Such is the meaning of our thanksgiving after Communion: "Soul of Christ, sanctify me!" In meditating on our soul's dignity, let us realize our Lord's interest in it; as God, He has created it, and as the God-man He has purchased it.

Of St. Bonaventure it is said that "his sweetest joy was to consider by how many titles he belonged to God." To know how one belongs to God is the supreme wisdom of the ages. Never say of any human being: he is a worthless creature. He is worth the life's blood of the Son of God. You perceive that our first meditation is on ourselves, our souls. May all transitory things vanish out of our minds whilst we mingle among God's angels and saints, and learn from Him the wisdom of eternity! O Lord Jesus Christ! open wide the book of Thy heart, that we may learn from it what it means to possess an immortal soul.

If a man were asked about his name, his parents, or his country, and he could tell nothing about them, would he not be considered grossly ignorant? Stupid as this would be, it is unspeakably more so to be ignorant of our soul's condition, of its country, and its Father. Many a man knows much more about his dogs than about his immortal soul. No such shame



rests upon us, thanks be to God. Yet now and then the unseen life of thought and love which is our spirit's occupation grows dim to us, and must be studied over again. Our attention to the divine life in us is withdrawn even by outward occupations, in themselves praiseworthy, and must again and again be renewed and fixed by meditation.

If we would know what place our soul holds in the order of existences, listen to God's prophet comparing it with the angels. He addresses the Creator and exclaims: "Thou hast made him [man] a little less than the angels, Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, and hast set him over the works of Thy hands" (Ps. viii. 6-7). The soul then is a spirit, less than the angels of God only because joined to a body. It is made of a heavenly substance, and endowed with living thought and purpose and memory. This being, whose existence it is to will and to love, to think and to decide, to long and to aspire—this wondrous being is my soul. How far superior is this soul of mine to that gross thing, my body!

In the ancient Scriptures the Holy Ghost says: "My delight is to be with the children of men" (Prov. viii. 31). The attraction of our souls draws God down from heaven itself. It is His delight to read our thoughts, to hear our words, to have a part in our souls' daily life, to win their love, to prepare them for Paradise. Therefore does St. Teresa say: "What must that dwelling be, in which a King so mighty, so wise and so pure, having in Himself all that is good, can delight to rest" (*Interior Castle*, I. Mansions, ch. i.).

In this life we are a little less than the angels. But our Lord says of good men, that in heaven they shall be the equals of angels: "They are equal to the angels and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Luke xx. 36). Two brothers think and act alike, they look alike, have a common love and common knowledge of things. So you and your guardian angel are two brothers, alike in all things, except that he wears the robes of heaven, and you your poor earthly

body, "this muddy vesture of decay." "God deliver us, my daughters," exclaims St. Teresa, "when we fall into any imperfection, from saying: We are not angels, we are not saints. Although we are not, still, it is the greatest help to believe that, with the aid of God, we can be, if we strive our hardest" (*Way of Perfection*, Stanbrook, ch. xvi., 8).

You may have seen an ape almost the size of a man, and you are both startled by the resemblance, and ashamed and humiliated to see one so like a man, that is, in some ways, the most disgusting of beasts. So does an angel feel when he looks on a soul in mortal sin. You have known a pure, refined woman. She becomes insane, and you are shocked beyond expression when you see her in the madhouse, a loathsome creature, sunk below the level of the brutes. So are we changed by mortal sin.

Consider the spirituality of the soul. Grind the body to powder, and you cannot so much as touch the spirit. It survives every stroke, it is superior to all that destroys the body. When the bodily life has gone, what becomes of the mental life? The spiritual being that you are—what will become of it when your body is stricken down by death? At a Christian's funeral, does his fidelity to truth pass into the grave? Does His love for the Eternal God rot in his coffin? The soul's life is as eternal as that of the truth it has loved and the divine law it has steadfastly obeyed. Your soul had a youth; it never shall have an old age—its youth is eternal. What old man but knows that his soul is younger than his body? As the body grows old, the spirit grows young. Yet how vast a multitude of men devote themselves exclusively to the dying life of their bodies.

The setting sun turns the gray clouds of evening into the golden and jeweled battlements of distant heaven. Yet the material is dull fog, and the beauty is glorious sunlight. So is the body a dull and miserable mass of flesh. The soul's brightness it is that shines in our bodily eyes with celestial beauty—or blazes forth with demoniac hate. It is the soul that thrills with

love's sweetness in the clasp of a hand that is mere clay. Look at that dead man's lips. They will soon be putrid in the grave and run with the worms of death. Yet while the soul ruled their utterance, they gave forth sounds of truth and love never to be forgotten; or they spat forth the eternal venom of revenge. For weal or woe eternal, the soul expends its life through the body.

Consider the dignity of our soul bestowed by God in its creation. Everything that God has made tells of its divine Master; but none of His creatures is so eloquent of Him as our soul, since it alone is the living reproduction of Himself. Stand upon a mountain top and look out upon the restless ocean, look upward into the overhanging firmament, behold the expanding and vanishing vista of hills and plains, forests and rivers. A sentiment of awe pervades your thoughts. You say: "Here is the presence of God; God's likeness is reflected in these splendors of nature, which but thinly veil His face." Yet these are but God's footprints, not His likeness; they are but marks of His handiwork. For water and air and the fiery sun, how can such things image the infinite Spirit of God? He never said of the earth and the sky and the sea, let us make these to our image and likeness. By His mere wish and word they sprang forth into being. A word, and the blue canopy of the heavens is spread out. A word, and the stars and the planets beam forth and begin their stately course. A word, and the sun bursts into being, flooding the universe with waves of light and heat. A word, and the waters and the dry land are divided, the sea rolls and swells in its unfathomed depths, the continents bloom with every variety of plant and tree, and are peopled with myriads of beasts and birds. "For He spoke and they were made; he commanded and they were created" (Ps. xxxii. 9). But it was not by words alone that God made man. "Let us make man to our own image and likeness," He said. And having formed his body out of the substance of the earth, "He breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became

a living soul" (Gen. ii. 7). It was the exercise of a power above words. Our creation is the breathing forth of God's own beauty and glory from the abyss of the divine life.

An image is true if the artist who makes it is perfectly well acquainted with the original it is designed to represent; and also if he be skillful in the art of image making. How does God, the divine artist, know Himself? With infinite knowledge. And what skill has He in making His own image? Infinite skill, for He ever and eternally produces and generates His divine Son, Who is "the brightness of His glory, and the figure of His substance" (Heb. i. 3). And it is thus that man is "the image and glory of God" (1 Cor. xi. 7).

But consider further our soul's dignity as shown by God becoming man. "God," says St. Francis de Sales, "has made us to His own image and likeness by creation, and made Himself to our own image and likeness by His Incarnation; after which He suffered death to ransom and save us" (*Love of God*, Mackey, p. 332). "What will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. xvi. 26) asks our Lord. What God will give in exchange for a man's soul is shown by the gift of His Only-begotten Son.

St. Paul says: "As many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ" (Gal. iii. 27). We are clothed and adorned with Christ; our soul's faculties are filled with His knowledge and His love; our Savior's precious blood is poured over us and into us by the infusion of the waters of Baptism. That is what is meant by our souls being Christened, made brethren and sisters of Jesus Christ and co-heirs with Him of His Father's kingdom. Has any single one of us ever appreciated the dignity of a Christian soul? St. Paul teaches that in Jesus Christ "dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. ii. 9); and that therefore it is absolutely true to say that our Savior is "the equal of God" (Phil. ii. 6). And my soul—O wonderful to say—is the equal of God by the valuation of the Father, because I have been purchased by the death of Jesus



Christ. "Know you not," exclaims the same Apostle, "that you are not your own. For you are bought with a great price" (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20).

See those little children racing after soap bubbles floating all bright and beautiful in the sunlight; and as they grasp them they waste away in their hands. Alas, the objects of vanity which men pursue are as frail as soap bubbles, and their brightness is as fleeting. O what folly to strive to satisfy a soul made to enjoy God alone with the fooleries of this world. St. Paul says: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But, when I became a man, I put away the things of a child" (1 Cor. xiii. 11). The toys of childhood: we look back with a smile at our happiness in possessing them, our proud sense of ownership of them, our total absorption in playing with them. Ah, have we no playthings in our grown-up years? Is all our time occupied with honorable labor and needful prayer, and well-earned, guileless relaxation? May God guide us away from the childish folly that may even now decoy our heart from the grave thoughts of eternity and the sober purposes of religion.

My state of life compels me to set apart many hours for good work, and some time is given to devout exercises. But does not my mind too often float away into the idle sunshine of imagination? Am I glad to work and pray? Am I the religious-minded Christian who seriously ponders "the days of old, and hath in mind the eternal years?" (Ps. lxxvi. 6.) Am I reaping a harvest of eternal life by the prayers and the sacraments and all the other ways of holiness that here abound? Or does obliviousness to divine things make great gaps in the hours that should be given to recollection? In time of famine men and women cook weeds and grass and the leaves of trees and eat them, in the vain hope of staying the pangs of hunger with the food of animals. So do men and women endeavor to satisfy the cravings of their immortal souls with the unnutritious joys of this world. Alas that we should

strive to appease our appetite for God with food fit only for creatures whose whole life is but a summer's day.

It is related of Blessed Cardinal Fisher that when he was in prison for refusing to take the oath of supremacy to Henry VIII., some of his friends visited him, urging all sorts of reasons why he should comply with the demands of the king. Wishing to rid himself of such tempters, he told them that if they would return on a certain day he would follow their advice, provided they answered one question to his satisfaction. This was agreed upon, and his friends came back at the appointed hour. The question was: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?" His friends retired. Cardinal Fisher won his martyr's crown.

A similar incident is told of Blessed Thomas More while locked in his prison cell. His wife used to come to him often, pleading with him to obey the king for the sake of his family. In reply he asked her one day how long she thought him likely to live, supposing he obeyed King Henry's command. She answered that he would likely live for twenty years at least. "If you had said twenty thousand years, there might have been some show of reason," he answered, "but what are even twenty thousand years of life on earth in comparison with eternity?" He, too, won his crown of martyrdom.

How carefully a mechanic learns his trade, how life-long is his patient and skillful toil in exercising it. A student of science spends many years among books and under professors that he may at last become a learned teacher. All men of character devotedly strive during the whole earlier and more precious part of life to have a business, all for this world. If we but did the same in the business of our soul's sanctification, for the deeper and deeper understanding of God's law, the practice of Christian virtue, we should become saints. Men are life-long drudges for gold; even "for a single penny," says the *Imitation of Christ*, "men will shamefully quarrel." Yet from pennies or from millions they must soon be dragged away



forever. Why will they not lay up "treasures in heaven" (Matt. vi. 20) for eternal possession and for unspeakable joy, the foretaste of which makes even this life an earthly paradise? It is only when the supreme importance of the spiritual life dawns on one's mind that the follies of this world begin to sicken him.

You know that the love of this earthly life lingers in our hearts after years spent even in cloistered piety. Yet it is a perishing life, of which the Apostle said: "The figure of this world passeth away" (1 Cor. vii. 31). At the point of death it vanishes from us like the sunlight from the eyes of a man stricken blind. At the end of the world it will perish utterly, with the sky and the starry heavens above it.

What folly, then, to fix our heart's affections on earthly things. Can such things satisfy the cravings of an immortal soul? If you did some heroic deed for your country and received in reward half of its imperial domain, that very moment a peremptory voice within you would whisper: Is this all? I want more. And as you coveted wealth when poor, you would covet greater wealth when grown rich. But in reward for the little deed of true repentance for your sins, you are given God's assurance from on high: "*I am thy reward exceeding great*" (Gen. xv. 1).

No, it is not the soul of man and this poor perishing earth that are destined to be united forever, but the soul of man and the Spirit of the infinite God, "in justice, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xiv. 17). Turn to your innermost soul, and you will find God dwelling there by His very essence and His power; and by His love also, if you be in the state of grace. There your prayers place you in the divine Heart Itself; there in your own soul is the Heavenly Father Who created you, the loving Redeemer Who died for you, the Holy Spirit Who sanctified you. After thus communing by prayer and meditation with God in your interior, you may turn to the same God in your outward life. In a good confession the Blood of Jesus

Christ cleanses away our sins, and bestows upon us the spirit of holy fear and of trustful love. Holy Communion gives us the Son of God in His humanity and Divinity in real and perfect possession, making our life His own.

After all this intimate contact with God Himself, all the promises of eternal happiness being lavished upon us, how different seems this passing show of a world. We understand better our Lord's description of its final destruction, and exclaim with the prophet: "I beheld the earth, and lo! it was void and nothing; and the heavens, and there was no light in them" (Jer. iv. 23).

God is the fullness of our joy, God alone. My soul—obscure creature though I may be—is infinitely more precious than all the world's treasures. Can I still people my thoughts, so dear to my heavenly Father, with silly dreams of earthly joy?

Finally consider how true views of our soul's dignity inspire us to works of religious zeal. The truest human reality is the marvelous fact that each human being has an immortal destiny. Therefore, to live rationally is to take a full share in those holy activities which make for eternal happiness, our own and our neighbor's. That and that alone satisfies our nobler aspirations; that and that alone justifies our claim to membership in the divine brotherhood of holy Church.

God constantly urges us to this glorious vocation by interior impulses, bright and strong; and externally by the example and precepts of His divine Son, and by the edifying lives of saintly brethren living and dead. The only self-content He allows us is in loving Christ perfectly and praising Him worthily. That comes first, and is invariably followed by the winning, through our own example and teaching, of our fellowmen to a clearer view of the supremacy and loveliness of spiritual things. Herein does the love of God absorb brotherly love, imparting to it its own perfect excellence, and sharing with it its own supreme prerogatives. Nations founded, continents explored and peopled, armies marshalled, wars fought to victory—these are within the

scope of a human force that is low, for it achieves but passing results. Such glory may and often does belong to monsters of iniquity. But the Christian who cleanses a sinner's soul from vice is master of a force essentially divine, and he wins a battle whose spoils are everlasting. If thou hast a militant nature, learn from God how to conquer thy brother's soul, or rather how to wrest it from the clutches of Satan. To place the gentle yoke of Jesus Christ upon a soul which has never known any divinity but passionate indulgence; to win the proud soul of a skeptic to the sweet influences of our Redeemer's love: these are exploits worthy of God Himself.

### III.

#### APPROVING THE BETTER THINGS, OR CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

CHRISTIAN and religious perfection is a word that is easily open to much misunderstanding. One thinks that if he fasted on bread and water he would be perfect. But St. Francis de Sales says that one may do that and yet "drink deep of his neighbor's blood, by detraction and calumny." Prayer is a necessary means of perfection. But one may say a great many prayers and even go often to the sacraments, and be only a perfect nuisance among his fellows; nor will he forgive injuries. Charity to the poor is a sign of perfection, but not an infallible one; for there are those who are generous to the poor, and yet so imperfect as not to pay their debts.

What, then, is perfection? St. Bernard tells us that it is a sincere purpose to go forward and increase in virtue, that is to say, in loving God and our neighbor. St. Paul teaches the same doctrine: "That your charity may more and more abound in knowledge and in all understanding, that you may approve the better things" (Phil. i. 10).

One sees an admirable spirit of progress in this. However little virtue we may have, let us strive in God's name to get a little more. The moment a sinner is absolved in a good confession and then receives Holy Communion, the test of his sincerity is his purpose to do "better things;" courageously to cut out the roots of evil habits, manfully to despise and avoid bad company, firmly to keep faith with God and his father-confessor about his prayers and his returning to the sacraments. The way of perfection is just a strenuous endeavor to get further and further away from sin, and become more and more sincere in love of virtue.

What is a bright sign of the beginnings of perfection? To make up one's mind with sincere humility, to begin immediately with the lowest works of the Christian life. Listen to the Psalmist: "And I said: Now have I begun; that is the change of the right hand of the most High" (Ps. lxxvi. 11).

Of course, there is much more to be said about perfection than can be told in one or two conferences. There are states of life, such as that of the priesthood and religious orders, which have admirable methods of perfection; and there is the miraculous perfection of the saints. These we do not now consider; but rather that perfection which is a resolute purpose to obey God's universal call to love Him better and better every day we live.

Once God restores us to His friendship by pardoning our sins, He draws us onward to closer friendship, to stricter observance of His commandments, to more loving treatment of our neighbor. You are ever advancing step by step towards the grave. God would have you advance at the same steady rate in the practice of virtue.

St. Bernard expressed his doctrine in the motto he gave the Knights Templars in their Rule, A. D. 1128, describing a life and death earnestness: "Alive or dead we are God's." Not merely the desire, but the resolute desire to advance in virtue for God's sake, is the root of perfection. Not only a longing to quit the least sinfulness for His sake, but a longing which is painfully intense, and brooks no delay in beginning and going onward—this quality of mind is indispensable to the pursuit of perfection. Of that condition St. Francis de Sales wrote to St. Jane Frances: "I tell you that my heart is made for that only." As the Psalmist said: "All my desire is before Thee, and my groaning is not hidden from Thee" (Ps. xxxvii. 10)—a desire to go deeper into God's heart. A desire for God unto groaning is nothing less than an inspiration towards perfection.

The ordinary Christian says in his prayers: "O my God! I



love Thee;" and this he repeats with the monotonous ebb and flow of a placid sea. The more aspiring soul does the same with a deeper consciousness of the divine deservings; but especially with no monotony, but rather a ceaseless variety of reasons and intuitions, and an occasional onflowing of a tidal wave of joyous purpose. Of all the incidents of such a life, none equals the absorbing self-gratulation of discovering the littleness of self and the greatness of God. The spiritual elation of fervent souls may be thus interpreted: How glad I am of my love for Jesus Christ! And, on the other hand, the real sadness of their life is the chagrin at some sudden slip of the tongue, or some unbecoming greediness at table—a sadness not unwelcome because it measures the most needful of all virtues, humility, a feeling peculiar only to those whose "sole object is real perfection, which is the fervent resolve to please God in all things and one's self in nothing" (*St. John of the Cross, Obscure Night*, Book I., ch. iii.).

It is of the state of aspiring love named Christian perfection that the spouse speaks in the Canticles: "If a man should give all the substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing" (Cant. viii. 7). The value of anything and everything is really known only by one who knows the good of close union with God. The worth of any joy is its rate of exchange for the love of God. There is no living without loving. The only loving is in loving God the infinitely love-worthy. All other true love comes from loving Him, or flows towards loving Him. How this drawing towards heaven should be cultivated by sanctifying our affections is thus stated by St. Teresa: "Let your *desire* be to see God; your *fear* be lest you lose Him; your *grief* that you do not enjoy Him; and let your *joy* be for what may lead you to Him" (*Maxim* 69, Dalton).

Promptness, heartiness, eagerness—if your religion possess these qualities, you need only be broken into the harness of holy discipline to achieve perfection.\*

\*"Devotio nihil aliud esse videtur, quam voluntas quaedam prompte

When one's mind is set on doing as our Lord and His saints did, he should realize that he is responsible for a new grace—perfection. When one is afraid of being half-hearted with God, he has received a vocation. St. Simon Stylites in the beginning of his sainthood had a vision which in after times he frequently told to beginners. He beheld himself digging for the foundations of a house. When he had dug deep enough, as he thought, he heard a voice commanding him to begin again and dig deeper—and this happened four times. Only then was he allowed to start building, with the assurance that he might safely erect as high and as splendid an edifice as he pleased. Thus was the saint instructed to deepen the foundations of desire, of resoluteness, of diligence, and especially of desire. "For the house which I desire to build is great; for our God is great above all gods" (2 Par. ii. 5). There is no room for sickly spirits among God's stalwarts. When the weather is rough a sick man lies abed; a convalescent creeps to the window, looks out and shivers; a thoroughly well man goes forth and breasts the storm. St. Teresa says, "there is no place for the chicken-hearted among God's chosen ones."

We see, then, that perfection is not exactly the practice of virtues for their own sake, such as poverty, chastity and obedience, mortification and humility—no, nor even for God's sake, but rather it is the eagerness of spirit which inspires this practice. The perfection to which all are called, to which some are specially called, is a holy ambition for a closer and closer union with God—"an interior binding to God," says Tauler, "joined to a great longing for eternity:" not saintliness ready made, but gladness and eagerness, to become a saint by longings and strivings, labors and sufferings for the things of eternity.

"Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly" (Eccles.

*tradendi se ad ea quae pertinent ad Dei famulatum.*" "It would seem that devotion [perfection] is only a certain kind of good will to promptly deliver oneself up to those things which pertain to the service of God" (Summa, 2a. 2ae. qu. 82, a. i.).



ix. 10). Make this energetic maxim a rule for spiritual exercises as well as for outward good works, and you have the plan of advance. Perfection as a condition is earnestness in praying and suffering and laboring. St. Francis de Sales interprets the inspired definition just given when he says that perfection "presupposes not a partial but a thorough love of God. As divine love adorns the soul, it is called grace, making us pleasing to the divine majesty; as it gives us strength to do good, it is called charity; but when it is arrived at that degree of perfection by which it not only makes us do well, but also work diligently, frequently and readily, then it is called devotion [perfection]." (*Devout Life*, Part I., ch. i.) But neither in spirit nor practice must this condition be motivated by human reason, only by the instincts and inspirations of divine grace. Under this progressive influence to worship, mediocrity becomes impossible. The motto is no longer, "Be safe," but "Be noble." Nor need one be scared by the task, for the sure safety of such a soul is in the choice of humble works rather than of showy ones. "There are no short ways to perfection, but there are sure ones," says Newman—namely, to do the ordinary work of each day thoroughly well, only regretting it were not done better.

The Flemish mystic, John Ruysbroeck, illustrated the value of inner resolve by saying to some visitors who asked to be instructed: "You are as holy as you wish to be." They went away offended; but he followed after them and said: "Dearest children, tell me how have I deceived you? I said your holiness was what you desired it to be; in other words, it is proportioned to your good will. Enter into yourselves, examine your good will—it is the measure of your perfection." Incited thus by God, the beginner proceeds to watch and regulate his native tendencies to pleasure and self-interest, to aversions and vanities. This era is related to later and more heroic conditions, as arithmetic to algebra, a necessary condition for reaching the easier and more familiar practice of Christ's counsels.

We do not insist that obedience to the call to perfection is a condition of salvation. Yet not seldom it is so plain, so imperative, that neglect of it is extremely dangerous. "If thou sayest: It is enough! thou hast perished," exclaims St. Augustine, referring to such a case. This has a closer, practical bearing than may at first sight appear. For if one says: "It is enough for me to keep out of mortal sin"—this self-bestowed license to commit venial sins quickly demoralizes his reckoning about mortal sins. The priest or religious who steers by the moral theology, which is so largely the manual of First Aid for desperate sinners, will soon stumble along on the brink of destruction. The one whose call to perfection is not only interior but also by reason of class and state of life, and who, instead of taking the maxims of the Gospel for his guide, prates of "common sense" as his standard, is marked for destruction. After losing the eager outlook for increase in virtue, one soon begins to degenerate. Growth is a law of life, of the spiritual life above all others. "The path of the just man, as a shining light, goeth forward and increaseth, even unto perfect day" (Prov. iv. 18). Desire is the inner source of holiness, but practice is necessary, for that alone gives development, and its neglect is attended with penalties, the chief of which is that form of spiritual sloth known as "low views." Purpose is the sap of the tree, practice the branches. Lop off a few lower branches to concentrate growth in the higher ones and you do well. But excess in this process of pruning drives back the sap of holy desire, and the whole tree soon rots and dies.

The purpose of "approving the better things" being firmly established, the methods are simple; and they begin with elementary virtue. "By what doth a young man correct his ways? By observing Thy words" (Ps. cxviii. 9), says the Psalmist. To keep the Ten Commandments, with a view to gradually correcting every littlest deviation from them, is to be far on the way to holiness. Many a simple soul, while dreaming anxiously of only keeping out of hell, wins by fer-

vent love a high place in heaven; just as plain vocal prayer sometimes becomes insensibly the medium of contemplation. "One day a nun came to me in great distress," writes St. Teresa, "because she did not know how to make mental prayer, nor could she contemplate, but was only able to pray orally. I questioned her and found that she enjoyed pure contemplation while saying the *Pater Noster*, and that occasionally God raised her to perfect union with Himself" (*Way of Perfection*, Stanbrook, xxx., 7). Thus it is with the observance of God's law from a powerful impulse of love for the Lawgiver.

Aye, the supreme law is love; and fortunately the love of God has many ways of drawing us. Of all of these the imitation of Jesus Christ is the compendium. He has abundantly emphasized three forms, which are the triple cord of union: imitating His poverty, by making little of the good things of this life; His chastity, by bridling, according to one's state of life, the concupiscence of the flesh; and His obedience, by subjecting self-will to God's will, as God lives and acts among us by our lawful superiors. These form, we say, the triple bond of union when inspired by love, the one virtue sanctifying them all: "Above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection" (Col. iii. 14). Done for the sake of imitating Him Who is all in all to us, these three Gospel virtues, as they are called, perfect the love of God in a Christian soul. By them does God make us "conformable to the image of His Son" (Rom. viii. 29).

In the sunlight of divine love every plant of virtue takes root in the soul. The love of Christ makes every virtue flourish after its own kind. Love of Christ: this is the very essence of perfection. "I remember a person," writes St. Catherine of Genoa, "possessed by a devil, who was forced to declare who he was. He cried out with great force: 'I am that wretch who is deprived of love.' He said this with a voice so piteous and penetrating that I was inwardly pierced with compassion, especially by the words *deprived of love*" (*Life*, ch. xiv.).

The loss of love is the loss of all; the possession of love is the endowment of all spiritual power. "Whatever such a one does he is eager to do more," says John Tauler. His alacrity is conspicuous, his spirit of venture in undertaking holy works is beyond his power to suppress.

We are supposing, meanwhile, the atmosphere of devotion, consisting of a regimen of prayer, spiritual reading, occasional intervals of recollection, all established upon a sufficiently frequent reception of the sacraments. Let him who desires to be a true Christian say to God incessantly: "O God! teach me to love to say my prayers, give me joy in reading good books, make attractive to me a quiet half hour in hearing Mass, deepen my sorrow in confession and my joy in Communion." To petition heaven thus earnestly is to be nigh to the company of the saints. The frequent advice, and now and then the authority of a spiritual director who is wise and calm and experienced, is, of course, also taken for granted.

Much, indeed nearly the whole of our visible striving, consists in curbing tendencies to evil, for when evil goes, holiness comes. Hence the Apostle's admonition: "Purge out the old leaven, that you may become a new paste" (1 Cor. v. 7). Perfection, as a course of conduct, is mainly a vigilant watch over venial weaknesses, resulting, in due time, in freedom from deliberate venial sins. To this process of purification is joined a constant elevation of motives, an unceasing recurrence to the original purpose; for, says St. Teresa, "God will not show Himself openly, or reveal His glories, or bestow His treasures, save on souls who prove that they ardently desire Him, for these are His real friends" (*Way of Perfection*, Stanbrook, xxxiv., 11). It must never be forgotten that it is rather in the motive than in the act that one increases in spiritual stature. Action may be now and then wisely limited, but there should be no limit to our desires.

Advance in any single virtue is a symbol of advance all along the line. One of the ripest fruits of a



spirit's love of God is exhibited by St. Monica in her farewell conversation with St. Augustine: "Son, for my part, there is nothing now in this life that gives me any joy"—they had been discoursing together about heaven. When any earthly thing must borrow joy from heaven to make you happy, then you are perfect.

Fondness for thinking about the last things of life is another good sign, a sure preventative of all serious venial offense. "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin" (Ecclus. vii. 40).

Nothing is more promising in a young man than the desire of bodily mortification, a desire spontaneous, hearty and submissive to authority. If this be joined to the higher and more difficult virtue of humility, every presage of a career of holiness is in evidence. We are supposing persons of fair talents and good sense; for certain eccentricities in a bright man and lack of brains in any man are fatal to all hopes of spiritual proficiency.\* But when a fairly intelligent, sensible character is resolutely bent on subduing his fleshly appetites, and is also quickly amenable to authority, then the whole voyage is plain sailing.

As we have already indicated, to perform commonplace actions with positive, wakeful diligence, and with distinct motives of love, is set forth as the whole substance of perfection by many spiritual writers. What seems a more insignificant occupation than answering the letters of pious girls and nervous women; or giving sermonettes to groups of peasants? St. Francis de Sales did such things all his life; it was the occupation which far out-measured his other duties in both time and care. And such zest and joy for the love of God did he expend in it that it made him the saint we venerate, and produced the immortal books that bear his name.

\*Chronic feebleness of bodily health is for heroic souls a constant spiritual help. But to all others it is such a justification for self-indulgence that novice masters need no other reason for excluding a subject.

Père Surin, S.J. thus summarizes the more hidden ways and means of perfection: "You will find true wisdom by becoming a child, renouncing all your rights, espousing the cross, and subjecting yourself to the interior movements of divine virtue" (*Lettres Spirituelles*, lxxxiii.). But of all the virtues there is only one (let us say it again) whose power of both saving and sanctifying is inherent—the love of God as He is revealed in Christ Jesus, and especially in His Passion and Death. Faith is the root and foundation of all holiness; but one may have it so as to remove mountains and yet be nothing. Hope is the anchor of sorrowful hearts in the divine haven of rest; and yet between ship and shore of the very harbor of safety one may become a castaway. But the sincere love of Jesus Crucified is resistless to save always and everywhere.

To this fervent, and therefore sure, adhesion to God all men are remotely called, and many specially and directly bidden. Too often they forfeit, or but partially use, their glorious privilege. The principles of religion which involve grave obligation and are armed with eternal penalties, these we hold in mind, and sternly observe them. But it is different with God's counsels—the free invitations of our Master to the nobler ways of love. And yet are the principles which concern not the salvation but the perfection of the soul less practical, less true that we should hold them only speculatively? How great a difference the threat of penalties makes in our acceptance of God's truth as a rule of life!

Here is a question both curious and critical. How much is one's progress hindered by persistence in some single unmortified practice, such as by full indulgence of appetite at table, by waste of time and of mental force in newspaper reading, or by long talks with favorites? What effect has any one of these practices (for a congestion of them all means a hopeless spiritual malady) on such essential conditions as purity of intention, or love of prayer, or zeal for souls? According to spiritual writers such unmortification, if of frequent occurrence,

blocks advance all along the line and threatens retrogression. To serve God perfectly one must practice vigilance with a particularity bordering on fanaticism. Thus in the old law, when God laid down rules for the Nazarites, He forced extravagant observances on them; they were not only to abstain from intoxicants, but "they shall not drink vinegar of wine, or of any other drink, nor anything that is pressed out of the grape; nor shall they eat grapes either fresh or dried" (Numb. vi. 3).

Holy living is seldom achieved *per saltum*—by one quick leap from the earthly into the heavenly character. This or that virtue may rise suddenly into maturity, but even this is rarely the case. The habit of responsiveness to God's working within us is of gradual, often imperceptible, growth. Allowing for exceptional cases of prodigies of grace in those destined for canonization, the Psalmist's teaching is of universal application: "In his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps in the vale of tears, in the place which he hath chosen. For the Lawgiver shall give a blessing; they shall go from virtue to virtue" (Ps. lxxxiii. 6, 7, 8). Through the vale of tearful penance, along roads of the Lawgiver's often mysterious selection, now by the beaten track of common practice, again by the secluded bypath of peculiar guidance, one spends his days and his years in this career, seldom pleasing to flesh and blood; never without joy to the spirit, because it is always an upward way, and the touch of the divine Hand is never absent.

The dignity of character, generated by this search for God is shown by the content of the soul with divine things alone. No one in the world is so independent of the frenzies of our fallen nature; no one so clearly reckons the true values of existence; no one has the divine standpoint so easy of access. They who strive after the better things are the real leaders of mankind. These stout-hearted champions of peace and of mutual affection, and of the sorrows of the Crucified, always win disciples. St. Teresa affirms that perfect souls never go alone to heaven.



This class of souls, valiant for God and patient with men, possess all things; they are God's favorites, and through them He lavishes His gifts upon the more faint-hearted masses. "And I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people and I shall be their God; because they shall return to Me with *their whole heart*" (Jer. xxiv. 7). St. Alphonsus used to say that he would not have anyone about him who was not endeavoring to become a saint. How much more shall God Himself select warm-hearted, disinterested, energetic friends for His close associates in the government of other men's lives. John Tauler is never tired of saying that God made all things for the perfect.

#### IV.

#### BANDED TOGETHER FOR PERFECTION.

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, distinguishing between classes and states of life, and the graces of advancement in the practice of virtue that God bestows upon souls, says:

"The motive of divine love pours forth a particular influence of perfection upon the virtuous actions of those who have in a special manner dedicated themselves to God to serve Him forever. Such are bishops and priests, who by a sacramental consecration, and by a spiritual character which cannot be effaced, vow themselves as marked and branded serfs, to the perpetual service of God; such are religious, who by their vows, either solemn or simple, are immolated to God in quality of living and reasonable sacrifices; such are those who betake themselves to pious congregations, dedicating themselves forever to God's glory; further, such are all those who of set purpose produce deep and strong resolutions of following the will of God, making for this end retreats of some days, that they may stir up their souls by divers spiritual exercises to the entire reformation of their life" (*The Love of God*, Book XII., ch. viii.).

Those whom God has favored with a call to community life, do not therefore despise the layman's holiness; not seldom, as in the notable case of St. Teresa, they take counsel about things divine with God's servants living in the world. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism," teaches the Apostle, "one God and Father of all, Who is above all and through us all, and in us all. But to every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the giving of Christ" (Eph. iv. 5, 7). In exact accord with this early Christian teaching is that of our present Holy Father, Pius X. In (we believe) his very first encyclical, he exhorts the priest-

hood to devote themselves to their own perfection with absolute earnestness. But the Holy Father introduces this by saying that all classes "are included in the exhortation 'to advance towards the perfect man, in the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ'" (Eph. iv. 13)—and only then does the sovereign pontiff enlarge on the superior vocation of the priesthood. A contrary spirit was rebuked by our Savior when He said to the Jews, great boasters that they were of their descent from the patriarchs: "God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Matt. iii. 9). How often do we meet with men and women in the Lives of the Saints placed low as to state of life, and yet high as to personal holiness. "It is better to be fervent in a state less perfect, than to be lukewarm in one more exalted," is a saying of the Abbot John, one of the Fathers of the Desert. Who would wish that St. Louis of France had been a priest? As a prince among princes he shed over the whole world the brightness of Christ's gospel—and yet had a wife and a large family of children, was an active statesman and an energetic soldier. Argument by contrast between one's own and another's condition is seldom fair; and it is always a menace to charity. Perfect love of God is a totally hidden, indeed an unrevealable, personal condition. St. Catherine of Genoa, a married woman and then a widow, who never left the world, speaks of the fullness of God's call to her and says: "I then gave the keys of the house to love, with full power to do all things that were necessary. I took no heed of body or soul, friends, relations or the world; but of all that the law of love required, I took care that the least part should not be wanting" (*Life*, ch. xxx.). St. Hedwige, duchess of Poland, when her husband died put on the religious habit, and lived in a monastery in obedience to her daughter, who was abbess there. "Nevertheless, by God's will," says Alban Butler, "St. Hedwige never made any monastic vows." Next to the apostolic state is that of martyrdom. Now the Roman *Breviary* says of St. Romuald, that "he burned with the desire of martyrdom, and that he journeyed towards Panonia

to obtain that crown, but was compelled by a fit of sickness to return again." St. Francis of Assisi was refused the same favor, though he penetrated to the heart of Mohammedanism. Were either of these less holy personally because he failed to gain the state of martyrdom? Or rather did he not obtain the martyr's merit by inward desire, while failing to secure the outward crown by the shedding of his blood? These and multitudes of others like them were held back by God in a lower *state* of perfection without any lessening of *personal* perfection. "It is an error, or rather a heresy," says St. Francis de Sales, "to say that devotion is incompatible with the life of a soldier, a tradesman, a prince, or a married woman. It is true, Philothea, that a devotion purely contemplative, monastical, and religious cannot be exercised in those vocations: but besides these three kinds of devotion, there are several others proper to conduct to perfection those who live in the secular state" (*Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part I., ch. iii.).

Let us praise the perfect wherever they are found—and they are everywhere. They are God's elect by a peculiarly sacred title. Their vision is clear, they understand events, and rate persons from the divine standpoint. They see God's plan in the world's happenings as in an open book, adoring God's wisdom in their sources and causes. Their love is true, whether they cling to God in the sweet silence of the convent, or in the whirl of the marts of trade. They love all good things in God, the Supreme Good. Let them mutually and universally praise one another's states of life, and adore the graces which generate the virtues of each. Wherever they are placed, they are the strong ones of the world, the only ones who can say in entire truth: "I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength" (Ps. xvii. 1). Yet there is no manner of doubt that the difference between states of perfection is in some ways essential. And the life in community fully deserves the high praises we shall now bestow on it.

Life in community is the ideal association of love and law in God's service; for as the greatest commandment is love (Matt.

xxii. 37), so can a religious by reason of his vows now say to God: "Thy law is in the midst of my heart" (Ps. xxxix. 9). By the rule of poverty God is loved with detachment from earthly allurements. Religious obedience roots one's motives in God's will, and while not smothering initiative, cleanses it of self-conceit. Chastity is ever confronted with its models in Jesus and Mary and Joseph, and perfectly well safeguarded from danger. The life is indeed hard, but for that very reason is full of merit; it is a life in the company of kindred spirits, stimulated by holiest emulation, and where spiritual direction is always accessible from guides of piety, learning, and experience.

But this boon is not possessed without a struggle. Many must tread under foot the dearest natural ties to enter this supernatural garden enclosed (Cant. iv. 12). A saying of St. Catherine of Siena is here proved true: "He who does not know how to cut a knot, will always remain bound." When St. Aloysius' father at last allowed him to join the Jesuits, he said: "My son, thou hast cut a deep wound in my heart." How strange! our Savior suffered a deep wound in His heart from our mortal sins, yet a Christian father is cut deep by his child's heroic return of love to God. "Paradise was not made for cowards," says St. Philip Neri. Neither was that strenuous apprenticeship for Calvary, the religious life; though soft-natured novice-masters allow cowards not a few to smuggle themselves in.\*

\*"God grant that those who receive unsuitable candidates may not suffer for it in the next world—there is always some slight pretext for thinking we may admit them, though in a case of such importance no excuse is valid" (*St. Teresa, Way of Perfection*, Stanbrook, ch. xiv., 2). Not only certainty of a candidate's lack of vocation, but even an acute doubt about it should cause his dismissal. The evil arises from the novice master being swayed by regard for the postulant's feelings, or those of his relatives; by being dazzled with his fine talents, though coupled with serious eccentricity or obstinate self-will; by the dream that the lapse of years will somehow or other accumulate a vocation in him. These and such like fallacious reasons account for the presence of eccentric, quarrelsome, or dead-and-alive characters in religious communities, leading to the demoralization of the fervent and the misery of all. Close



When the obligations of the religious state are assumed, they become marks of close resemblance to Christ Crucified. Rules and constitutions should become symbolical of the five wounds of the Crucified; then it is that they tell of motives. After that, the service of God is at its best. One is dainty, indeed, who looks for sweeter peace or cleaner joy than dwells in the heart of an honest member of a fervent community. Newman says that what brings men to communion is "a thirst for the living and true God"—precisely the description of the mind that brings a true soul to the door of a convent on "the happiest day of his life," and keeps him within its rugged discipline of self-denial, developing and maturing daily the earliest impulses of grace.

How good a religious should I be? is a bit of self-questioning that is never asked without the breathing of God's spirit. The answer may be both human and divine. As good as a simple-hearted layman thinks me to be, is the human answer. The divine answer—dare I utter it? As good as God intended me to be when first He called me to perfection. But perhaps one has entered religion from worldly motives, and now after years of misery looks back upon the step with bitter regret for its temerity. Let him find in this very bitterness of regret a form of vocation, and the Providence which permitted a rash intrusion into the holy place will grant unto him a grace of benignant welcome even to its most favored privileges.

It sounds paradoxical, but it is true; no one should aspire to active zeal for souls unless he has a drawing towards seclusion from them in the interior life; for religious influence must be

observation persuades one that the exclusion of unfit subjects is the prime duty of novice masters, rather than the admission of worthy ones, whose credentials are generally written fair and broad upon their daily lives. The door of the house of novices should swing outward more easily than inward. The last letter that St. Francis Xavier wrote was to Father Gaspar Baertz, penned on the island of San Chan, November 13, 1553: the Saint died December 3d. We copy the last paragraph: "Pray give particular attention to what I am about to add: be very severe, I would almost say be most fastidious, in choosing persons to be received into the Society," and he instances a certain unworthy member by way of illustration.



dispensed by inwardly religious spirits. Now the fruit of souls is garnered by those who move back and forth between men and their Maker, between prayer, solitude, and devout reading on the one hand, and instruction, edification, and correction on the other. The holy dispositions generated by prayer, obedience, humility, love, must animate exterior labors for souls if they are to be really fruitful. Truest service of one's neighbor can only be given after obedience to some such heavenly command as drove Abbot Arsenius into the wilderness: "Arsenius, flee, hold thy peace, and be at rest." Where may this be obeyed except in a community, or in utter solitude. One should not be eager for acquaintance with men till he has become well acquainted with God—and with himself as God reveals him to himself in solitude. We find in the lives of the missionary saints such expressions as these, speaking of their earlier days: "Burned in solitude;" "estranged from the world;" "far remote from men;" "alone with God." This was the prelude to those outward achievements which transformed men and nations from paganism into Christian faith and love.

Lallemant goes far when he says (*Spiritual Doctrine*, p. 273, Faber's edition) that we must be greatly addicted to personal use of spiritual things before we can "go out of ourselves for the service of our neighbor without prejudice to our interior life; not giving ourselves up wholly to others, nor applying ourselves to exterior occupations except by way of diversion, so to say; and thus our principal business shall ever be the interior life." Does this wise teacher mean that a religious person's time of prayer shall be measured like an ordinary man's time for work? And shall his occupation with his neighbor's necessities be related to prayer like an occasional interval of relaxation? It would seem so. To approximate to this end, the ordering of the outer and inner life must be done by rule. Following St. Bernard, whom he quotes in approval, Lallemant compares a spiritual worker to a reservoir, and the unspiritual one to an aqueduct. The first one stores the graces he is going to dispense

in his heart, and only when their fullness has become his own does he give them forth, having become to men, by his holiness, a wondrous grace himself. The least consideration shows the value of community life in facilitating this.

Sometimes the opposition to following a vocation comes from within, nor does this always spring from motives quite unworthy. God corrects it when He pleases. When the Christians of Milan proclaimed that Ambrose must be their bishop, he ran away; he fled in the night towards Pavia. Doubtless he knew the road well, and he traveled the whole night long. But when morning dawned he found himself back again at the very gate he had left many hours before. He could not run away from his divine vocation. But, alas, there are some whose resistance is from unworthy motives, and who manage by cowardly shifts to get to their Pavia and beyond, and to live a whole life mingled of external ease and interior self-reproach, renegades from a true vocation. Well does John Ruysbroeck say: "It is of the nature of love to be always giving and always receiving. The love of Jesus is, therefore, exacting and generous. He gives all that He has and all that He is; all that we have, all that we are, He takes."

"The cowl does not make the monk," is a saying old and true. What then does? Surely the original vocation of God developed and strengthened by time. Thus does our Lord admonish the delinquent Bishop of Ephesus: "Be mindful, therefore, from whence thou art fallen; and do penance, and do the first works" (Apoc. ii. 5). The vocation of God, sealed by His Church in receiving the vows, is a plain mark of salvation—"the highest grace after baptism," to quote a somewhat extravagant and yet not ill-founded estimate. It may come suddenly, like dawn of day in the tropics, or it may grow insensibly into control during a long course of years. But in any case the call of God to a perfect life is no less than a miracle of grace. It involves grave responsibilities, but none too hard for fulfillment, none whose fulfillment is not its own reward.

Cost and compensation rule all life. Our Redeemer was the divine Source of merit, and yet He earned every thrill of His eternal joy by a pang of suffering in His earthly career: the glory of the God-man is a reward of merit. It was revealed to St. Elizabeth of Hungary by the Blessed Virgin, that although she was conceived immaculate, yet apart from that she did not receive a single grace, gift or virtue from heaven without immense labor, incessant prayer, fervent desires, many tears, and much affliction. Her vocation, or rather her unique predestination, was a mere boon; her perfection, considered as a way of life, was a hard-earned crown of glory. Now no path to glory is so splendid, no joy of fruition so sweet, as our Lord's and His Mother's, whose imitation in this, as in everything else, is the only reason for banding souls together into a common life.

There is no more touching spectacle than that of a group of young women taking the vows of religion. Fervor then is solemn in its intensity, renunciation of all that the world holds dear is absolute, and the occasion is worthy, if any human occasion can be, of the presence of the Eucharistic Christ approving both the sacrifice of those generous souls and its acceptance by Holy Church. But the spirit's dedication is the true though hidden majesty of that veritably august function. The angels behold the interior *Vocation*: the original, awful reverence for the divine Spouse, coupled with tenderest love; each soul inflamed with love of the immortal part of life, thrilled with unspeakable interest in divine things, enraptured with their beauty; disgusted with the world, despising its vanities and follies, which they incessantly compare with the soul's treasures of celestial wisdom; longing to begin their order's apostolate; eager to save the world in company with Christ Crucified. How appropriate to each of these favored ones is the prophet's expression: "The lines are fallen unto me in goodly places; for my inheritance is goodly to me" (Ps. xv. 6).

Does it happen that any of these ever in course of time regret their vocation? Alas, it does happen. Low views of the

order's mission creep in, soon followed by a grudging observance of rule. One or at most two terms of an over-indulgent Superior will fill the community with dispensations, and drop the weaker characters into mere denizens of the house of God, while the better disposed spirits are tortured with despair. Fears about health are soon blown into panics. Excuses are the rule, and even these are readily omitted, to the sad hurt of interior dispositions, for the soul that feeds on dispensations soon languishes with inanition. Exercises purely religious are easily shifted aside in favor of "work," until at last the main purpose of the community is business and not perfection. Into a community such as that comes a retreat; it is literally a Godsend. It takes us back to our "first works;" in renewing the vows it renews their spirit.

## V.

### FEAR AND LOVE.

"Come, children, hearken to me; I will teach you the fear of God" (Ps. xxxiii. 12).

No words can exaggerate the importance of that element of the spiritual life to which holy wisdom itself points, saying: *Ecce principia*, behold my beginnings—"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ecclus. i. 16).

Religious fear is reverential awe at the thought of God, the almighty, all holy, all true, all good. As a moral force, the fear of God is a state of mind which compares one's own littleness with God's infinite majesty: an overwhelming argument by contrast. Out of this general sense of divine majesty and human insignificance flow the motives which place precautions against sin, and secure their exact observance: "The fear of the Lord hateth evil" (Prov. viii. 13).\*

The relation of fear to penance is essential. I repent because I fear pain, and this is slavish fear. I repent because I fear the loss of joy, and this is called mercenary fear. I repent because my sins involve the loss of God's love, here is a trait of true friendship, and a fear almost indistinguishable from love. Then there is the fear of the perfect soul, a fear felt not in the first act of sorrow, but in the second and much later era of penance, by which a man trembles at the injustice he has done

\*The whole meaning of this conference may be given in the following words of St. Teresa: "The weapons which we may use in our most dangerous warfare against surprise, my daughters, and which His majesty has given us, are love and fear. Take this advice: it is not mine but your Teacher's—try to keep them on your journey [to perfection]. Love will quicken your footsteps, and fear will make you look where you will set your foot down, lest you should trip against the many stumbling blocks on that road by which all men must pass in this life. Thus armed, you will be secure from pitfalls" (*Way of Perfection*, Stanbrook, ch. xl., 1).



to God, prescind (as far as that may be possible) all threat of eternal pain, all loss of eternal joy, and with total disinterestedness taking God's part against himself. Thus the perfect Christian becomes the confidential servant of religious fear, while the imperfect Christian remains always its drudge.

The soul's love of God is in its inspiration to loyal service, by which it is influenced interiorly to be and to act as a true child of the divine Father advancing His kingdom; this is called the love of benevolence or of well wishing. The love of complaisance or delectation is that wherein our only true joy is that divine sweetness which we feel in thoughts of our heavenly Father's power and goodness, and His infinite love for us. Now this loyalty to God and this joy in Him are, be it remembered, directed to His divine Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead corporeally" (Col. ii. 9). Our motives for loving God are many, and each of them has its peculiar value. But the supreme motive is God's love-worthiness. This alone is purely disinterested. Yet both nature and grace demand a recompense, for an oblation so supreme as perfect love, and St. Teresa tells us what that recompense is: "We have many motives to love; but they are all grounded on this good foundation, the hope of being rewarded by a return of love" (*Way of Perfection*, ch. xl.). O God, how precious is my love of Thee, since it wins Thy love for me!

Out of this very loyalty springs the sharpest fear known to devout souls. For as Tertullian says: "How can one love God without fearing that he shall cease to love Him?" There comes a time in the life of every man who is destined to be perfect, when hell's worst torments seem nothing in comparison with the feeling that oppresses him, the dread lest he shall give up loving God. This is the final purgation of his spirit. This awful fearfulness is the cry of the holy man Job: "I have always feared God as waves swelling over me, and His weight I was not able to bear" (Job xxxi. 23).



A calm and well-grounded fear is like the first deposit of a rich man in the bank—the nest-egg of a great fortune. But this is not the speechless fear of the panic-stricken Apostles at our Savior's Transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 2); nor the nervous dread of a scrupulous soul; nor the despairing fear of a reprobate. Christian fear, says St. Francis de Sales, is more distressed about the danger of losing God's love than the risk of going to hell.\*

Not only is fear a faithful servant of love, but it serves equally all other virtues. It stands ready to guard the virtue of faith with its sentinels, preventing the intrusion of doubts and of alien opinions. He who fears God in his heart cherishes His words in his mind. The virtue of faith being an infused certitude excludes fear of error; the virtue of fear, as the sentinel of faith, is a true estimate of the tendencies to error innate in human nature. The more one fears his mental instability, the less need he fear lapsing from the truth of Christ.

\*St. Francis Xavier's profession of disinterested love of Christ beautifully expresses this noblest of all human emotions, whether it be called love or fear:

"My God I love Thee, not to gain  
The bliss of Thy eternal reign,  
Nor to escape the fiery lot  
Reserved for those who love Thee not.  
Thou, Thou, my Jesu, on the tree  
Didst in Thine arms encompass me.

"Thou didst endure the nails, the lance,  
Disgraces manifold, the trance  
Of bloody sweat, the boundless seas  
Of bitterness and anguishes;  
Nay even death's last agony;  
And this for me—for sinful me!  
Most loving Jesu, shall this move  
No like return of love for love?

"Above all things I love Thee best,  
Yet not with thought of interest;  
Not thus to win Thy promised land,  
Not thus to ward Thy threatening hand;  
But as Thou lov'st me, so do I  
Love, and shall ever love—and why?  
Because Thou art my God and King,  
The source and end of everything."

It is not in the glare of day that man understands the heavens—the astronomer studies light from the midst of darkness. So do we know the greatness of God's truth better by humble meditation on our own puniness of intellect, than by directly contemplating the infinitude of heavenly wisdom. He who fears God in faith has little intellectual trouble to reckon with.

In its relation to the divine virtue of hope, religious fear strips our confidence in God of the illusion of merit. It has been truly said that we must die with our head between two pillows. One is the avowal that we deserve nothing but hell; the other a perfect trust in the mercy of God, Whose power to save is infinite, and Whose promise to save is sealed with the blood of Calvary. Fear and hope are well coupled in our great Psalm of hope, the *De Profundis*: "If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it? For with Thee there is merciful forgiveness" (Ps. cxxix. 3, 4). The more I fear the rising gale of temptation, the more glad am I to feel my ship swaying calmly on the anchor chain of hope. Too many good Christians, however, allow their fears to overshadow their hopes; we hear persons of ripened virtue expressing doubts of their eternal salvation, and they think that timid state of mind to be pleasing to God. Not so; for our fear should be concerned with our own weakness, and should be coupled with a feeling of confidence in God's strength. Nor should we forget that love, and love alone, is the virtue that crowns our efforts as well as sanctifies them, even though we must work out our "salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. ii. 12). For St. Paul admonishes us: "You have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father)" (Rom. viii. 15).

Relegated to its proper place of subjection to love, fear is a mighty help. Our Savior once said to St. Catherine of Siena: "Holy fear is the guardian of the soul." Every spiritual man has his moments of misgiving, either as to the validity of his repentance for past sins, or as to God's granting him the

grace of final perseverance. All may be settled by such questions as these: Do you dread offending God? Are you anxious and distressed lest He abandon you? If so, then all is well. Fear at its worst is the gloomy vigil of the high festival of love, whose joy is enhanced by contrast with the preceding sadness of fear. Yet this sadness sometimes haunts the deathbed of saints. Arsenius, a venerable Father of the desert, wept as he felt death approaching, though he had given up his place at court as tutor to the sons of Theodosius the Great, and had lived fifty-five years in the solitude of Egypt. His associates chided him: "Father, do you weep? Are you, like others, afraid to die?" The saint answered: "I am seized with a great fear; nor has this dread of death ever been absent from me since I first came into this wilderness." Yet when death actually came it found him in great peace and full of confidence in God.

To the mass of Christians the fear of God serves as the main element in religion, but not without much admixture of love. And the wider the door of fear the easier the entrance of love. The more terrified a vile sinner shows himself in confession, the more lovingly is he treated by his Father confessor, who in this but imitates the gentleness of God. Depth of fear is a sign of fitness for absolution, though the penitent has been thrice dyed in guilt—for absolution and for Holy Communion, which is possession of the all-lovely and all-loving God. How holy is religious fear, since it invites divine love to come down upon it, and never invites in vain. Upon a reasonable and religious fear of God, a tender grace of love descends by an eternal predestination. St. Chrysostom says: "He who fears God has indeed an iron chain about his neck; but as he learns to love God, these fetters are found gradually changing into a golden necklace."

To the élite of Christians not fear but the love of God is the main element in religious existence. And it is very consciously so in those who are professedly striving for perfection, especially love for our Lord Jesus Christ. But the more surely

they know they possess it, the more closely do they call fear to their side, lest their heads should be turned by vainglory, or the enemy should catch them napping. They realize that they "have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. iv. 7). As the ordinary Christian's timidity is heartened by love, so the loving Christian's security is tempered by fear. In some such way as gold is coined with an alloy, a baser but tougher metal, which fits it for hard everyday usage. This does not degenerate into scrupulous fear, which is the quaking of a soul whose nerves have overpowered its good sense: "There have they trembled with fear where there was no fear" (Ps. lii. 6). The good Christian's fear is based rather on his vivid realization that for all he has and all he is, he is indebted to God. As he loves ardently, he fears reasonably, crying out to God constantly: "I will keep Thy justifications; O do not Thou utterly forsake me" (Ps. cxviii. 8). St. Philip Neri began each day with this aspiration: "O Lord, keep Thy hand upon Philip this day, or Philip will betray Thee." He had no other fear but fear of God, a trait of all maturely sanctified Christians.

Who indeed is a truly courageous man but a man in whom the fear of God is so strong that there is no room for any other. As to human fear, Père Boudon is spokesman for the more advanced spirits: "In order to be firmly established in a divine place which devils and men cannot disturb, we must (to express it in a few words) fear nothing and hope nothing from any created being" (*Devotion to the Angels*, Part II., ch. iii.). Nothing is so barren as the fear of men; nothing so fruitful as the fear of God, except the love of Him. Human fear is close to hatred of men, while religious fear is akin to love of God. St. Francis Xavier wrote home from the Indies: "Dangers, labors and the like, which my timid friends vie with one another to persuade me are formidable, I count as naught. I laugh at them all in full security, and the simple fear of God alone extinguishes in me all fear of His creatures" (*Life of Coleridge*, vol. ii., p. 96).



The mingling of fear and love makes what is called reverence. It is a blend of virtues productive of the readiness and quietude of obedience. For many years of a life of perfection—taking men generally—reverence for God will be the best that the soul can do by way of love, or at least by way of proving to itself its love for God. If any poor creature but knew God well and knew itself only a little, it would hardly dare to say with full stress of meaning: O my God, I love Thee; but rather: O my God, I reverence Thee. A sweet reverence, indeed, but that rather than pure love. As long as we are here we must at close intervals be distressed with the thought of penance undone and of our latent weaknesses. This feeling need only be intermittent. But the warning of St. Paul is peremptory: "He who thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. x. 12). Love, to be distinctly and solely itself, must be integral, absolutely perfect. Of that love St. John says: "Perfect love driveth out fear" (1 John iv. 18). And where is that perfect love to be found? In heaven alone, though the saints have enjoyed its undisputed reign for occasional and brief intervals. In heaven there is indeed perfect love, and yet, if we dare use the expression, even there love honors fear by using its holy formalities of awe and reverence, as the blessed man Job tells of the highest angels: "The pillars of heaven tremble and dread at His beck" (Job xxvi. 11). Inanimate nature (to use an illustration) in woodland and stream, sky and ocean, seldom gives us an unmixed and wholly elementary color; but rather an infinite gradation of colors and neutral tints, one elementary color blending or shading off into another. So all of our virtues here below are by the grace of God mingled one with another; and no two are so inseparably graded and shaded lighter or darker, one into the other, than the love of God's goodness and the fear of His justice.

In human affairs fear is the mother of prudence. In spiritual affairs it is the mother of prudence applied to a divine end, and transfigured with divine light: "The fear of the Lord is



the beginning of wisdom" (Ecclus. i. 16). Though the last in the list of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and the lowest in essential quality, the fear of God is first in order of time, and is introductory to all the others. Study for a moment and see how wise is fear. For the opposite of religious fear is presumption and misuse of God's mercy, trusting to be saved without keeping God's law; it is defiance and contempt of God in His dearest attribute of pity for sinners. Certainly an attempt to outwit God is the uttermost limit of folly. On the other hand, the degeneracy of religious fear is despair of God's mercy, by which one persuades himself that his power of sinning is superior to God's power of forgiving. Could unwisdom go farther than this? It began with Cain: "My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon" (Gen. iv. 13); it was perfected in Judas Iscariot: "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood . . . .and he went and hanged himself with a halter" (Matt. xxvii. 4, 5). Measure the holiness of religious fear by the malice of the opposite vices.

Take the lowest grade of religious fear and see how wise it is, namely, utterly slavish fear (*timor serviliter servilis*). It moves away from sin reluctantly, and only because it dreads the fire of hell; it is not childish but slavish. It looks not to God at all, or scarcely at all; it is flight from pain, that and nothing more. Now one would imagine that such a brutish fear could have no place in religion. But such is not the case, for vast numbers of brutalized men by it set forth to paradise. In the beginning more afraid of the devil than of God, they are nevertheless in a mood in which they will listen to God's messengers. Holy Church is much engaged in arousing any fear of the penalties due to sin. Mere terror—when founded on truth and flying towards God—mere terror is the beginning of wisdom. Even saints have never been above threatening themselves with hell fire when they were struggling with powerful temptation.

Both the heroic Christian and the newly converted murderer use the same formulas in the confessional, the *Con-*

*fiteor* and the act of contrition, containing words of sorrow for fear of judgment and hell, mingled with the loftiest motives of disinterested love. Every fear of God or of God's penalties, however low, gropes towards the soul's safest goal and dearest need—divine love. We have spent much of our priestly life preaching missions to Catholics, and, as a spokesman of missionaries, we affirm that arousing fear of the lowest sort is in the end productive of the highest motives of contrition, and in uncounted cases is absolutely necessary to secure repentance.\*

Listen to a signal of danger given by St. Teresa to her nuns: "Another very treacherous temptation is a feeling of confidence, that we shall never relapse into our former faults or care for worldly pleasures again. We say to ourselves: Now I know what the world is, that all it contains passes away, and I care more for divine things. This temptation is the most dangerous of all, especially at the beginning of the religious life; for such souls, feeling that they are safe, do not guard themselves against occasions of sin. Unforeseen obstacles arise in their path, and God grant that they may not fall lower than ever before, and if they do fall, that they may rise again" (*Way of Perfection*, Stanbrook, ch. xxxix., 5).

Consider how under the old law the almost universal title to divine favor was in fearing God; and fear was a second name for love itself, as well as for faith and for hope. God said to Abraham after the sacrifice of Isaac—an act renowned as one of mingled faith and hope: "Now I know that thou fearest God, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for My sake"

\*Among his fellow missionaries the present writer, who had for a long time the privilege of calling souls to repentance, used to hear it said that the ideal band of missionaries is composed, first, of one whose sermons are the thunders of Sinai; the mountain quakes, the sky is lurid with God's wrath, sinners are beside themselves with terrors. Second, one who is the perfection of kindness, his very appearance and the tones of his voice, to say nothing of the divine sweetness of his words, inviting the frightened sinner to his counsel and comfort as if to the embrace of Christ Himself. Third, one who is the familiar instructor in Catholic doctrine, and in the preparation needed for receiving the sacraments.

(Gen. xxii. 12). "Hast thou considered," said God to Satan, "My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a simple and upright man, and fearing God and avoiding evil?" (Job i. 8). Yet this noble character was a man of deep love, as he proved by many terrible trials. Indeed all the ancient dispensation was founded on fear, and its heroes were formed by that virtue, though not without a generous admixture of love. And it was in the interests of this holy virtue of fear that the Church of the new law, though so overflowing with love in every aim and motive of life, yet chose for her public worship prayers, for the most part, taken from the Hebrew scriptures, instinct with fear, yet generative of love.

Look at our Savior's life. His birth fills us with joy. His death is the very inspiration of fear. As He set forth to redeem us, "He began to fear and to be heavy" (Mark xiv. 33). His Resurrection is indeed a marvelous triumph, yet it spread even among His friends an awe so deep as to resemble terror. His longest prophecy tells of His second coming, filling all the tribes of the earth with dread alarm (Matt. xxiv. 30). How many times St. Paul in his epistles mentions and sometimes discourses at length of the terrors of God's judgment, speaking always to saints and to sinners indiscriminately. In civic life when a nation has nothing to fear, and its citizens are wealthy and free from danger, they gradually become addicted to idleness and luxury. Then the wiser spirits are filled with forebodings. Degeneracy is soon apparent, and cowardice and venality, followed by loss of liberty, and finally of wealth itself. So it is with the kingdom of the soul. Fear, while it is servile, is barren of real virtue; but as long as it lasts, even as servile, it hinders relapse into vice. It is a notable thing that when Adam was in a state of original justice, filled with love's best gifts, the Creator placed fear as the stated motive of his obedience: "In whatsoever day thou shalt eat of that tree, thou shalt die the death" (Gen. ii. 17). It was against fear that he struggled when he sinned, as well as against love. As

with Adam, so with every sinner; the reason of his downfall is that at a certain point he says, I need not be afraid.

Servile fear is no honor to God; for what father feels honored by his son's dread of the rod? Yet it is the beginning of salvation; for though the fear is a slave's fear, yet it is felt by a son—one who knows of a better fear, a filial fear, and longs to grow worthy of its reverence and its love. Genuine penance, full of painful thoughts of retribution, is a condition precedent to all grades of love of God in a race bowed down under the guilt of sin. No man may ask for love without offering fear in exchange, much fear, fear rightly prized. A good man who has intervals when he quails before God, who has a greater fear of God than a coward has of death—has it and is glad of it—such a man is nigh to perfection. And in the worst sinner's heart there is a dormant fear of God—unless he be already reprobate. Awaken that dormant servile fear into activity, let it become the motive of some religious act, even some timid longing towards virtue, some panic flight from the dark abyss, and you have helped him to his first step to heaven. To facilitate that, to scare sinners into it, or allure them towards it, is one of the divinest vocations. It is a grace perfectly Christ-like to be able to blanch the cheek of a wicked man with a dread of eternity based on the lowest motives. A haunting terror, a blind panic, is the gift of God to millions of souls, not the best, indeed, but the best they are capable of. To add to this the sentiment of love is a power and a privilege of an infinitely higher order, but not more necessary, not at all so difficult. Fear is needed to begin with, love is needed to finish the good work. "The mercy of the Lord is from eternity and unto eternity upon those that fear Him" (Ps. cii. 17). Mercy and grace, and all forms of heavenly love, descend into the fearful heart, as the good seed falls upon ground cut by the plough and torn by the harrow. O my soul, cherish fear as a mark of love's predestination, for fear is granted thee for love's sake. "Know thyself," says St. Bernard, "that thou mayest fear God; know Him that thou mayest also love Him."



## VI.

### MORTAL SIN, OR THE HOLY WAR.

“Who will justify him that sinneth against his own soul? And who will honor him that dishonoreth his own soul?” (Ecclus. x. 32.)

NOTICE one whose blood is bad, and see the blotches here and there on his skin. Notice another who has the smallpox; there are indeed blotches here and there; but he has a deadly disease, whereas the other has only some passing taint in his blood. Such is the difference between careless Christians and those who are in the state of mortal sin. Venial sin is a light offense against God, and mortal sin is a deadly one, a violation of God’s law in a serious matter, willful and deliberate. Remember well this difference, so essential; fully the difference between careless friendship and deadly animosity. For in meditating on mortal sin we must guard against scruples about venial sins.

The term mortal as here used well expresses the truth; for a knowing and willful disobedience of God’s commandments in a serious matter is a death-dealing stroke upon the soul—it is soul suicide. A sinner may be externally the picture of life; our Savior says that spiritually he is “full of dead men’s bones and all filthiness” (Matt. xxiii. 27). O thanks be to God that He says no such thing of us! And yet it behooves us to remember the wickedness of our former days, to lament certain woeful events of the past, and to exclaim: “The sins of my youth and my ignorances, remember not, O Lord” (Ps. xxiv. 7). Furthermore, our retreat is not wholly for ourselves, and we must open our hearts to that vast multitude of men and women whose entire lives are an unbroken succession of grievous sins: apostates and blasphemers and profaners of Jesus Christ in His sacraments; drunkards and adulterers and wretches whose sen-



suality is nameless; thieves and murderers; corruptors of youth; men and women who having the true faith of God yet never go to Mass, nor ever dream of their Easter duty; others who for money and vanity willfully and gladly live without God in this world (Eph. ii. 12) and without hope; and others again who of set purpose sin on and on, cherishing a dreadful assurance of going to heaven notwithstanding. O shall we not dwell with sorrow upon their wickedness, all these teeming millions of our fellowmen, and offer up most fervent prayers for their salvation? ✓

They are under God's anathema. And even His inanimate creatures, could they be capable of it, would unite to destroy them. The earth would say: The sinner is duller and deader than I am, for I smile towards my Maker with my tiers of flowers and my green hills, and he blasphemes his Maker: would that I could swallow him up. The rocks would say: His heart is harder than we are; for it is written that at the death of the Son of God to atone for this man's sins "the rocks were rent" (Matt. xxvii. 51), and his heart is proof against any spasm of sorrow: would that we could fall upon him and crush him. The serpents would say: would that we could sting him to death; for his poison is deadlier than ours, for ours kills only the body, and his evil example and foul words kill immortal souls.

Think of the injury sinners have done to Christ Crucified. The whole worth of Calvary was theirs, the agony and death of Christ was for them, the pity of His heart, the plea of His soul to His Father, all was for them. And they so little regard all this that they have sinned and do yet sin, as if their very purpose was by constancy in vice to make the death of Jesus Christ as vain and useless as that of any beast, crucifying again and over again "the Son of God in their hearts, and making a mockery of Him" (Heb. vi. 6). What a spectacle confronts us as we look over the masses of mankind. Immense numbers of them born into this world for God's service and instructed how to honor Him, yet turn away from Him by mortal sin, live like animals their whole lives long, die wickedly, and are

finally buried in hell. Are we not born into this world, and called to holiness of life by a miraculous vocation to pray, to suffer and labor our whole lives long, to save them from that eternal doom?

When we say that the soul in mortal sin is dead, we speak figuratively; and yet the Apostle's words have a literal force: "She that liveth in pleasures is in death while she liveth" (1 Tim. v. 6); for grievous sin is death and life in a monstrous union. It is as if the soul were an electric force injected into a corpse to make it move about like a live man. For the actions of such a body would have as much meaning to really living men as the actions of a wicked soul have to the angels of God. What but death is in the life of a bad man? Surely his curses are the language of that abode of eternal death, Gehenna; and all his foul conduct is the forecast of the misery of the deep pit. Grievous sin is called mortal or deathly, because death is its penalty. To turn from God is to turn from life. On account of mortal sin, the crime of betrayal of the heavenly Father, the ban of death was launched at the beginning. For what said Eve to the tempter? "The fruit of the tree which is in the midst of paradise, God hath commanded us that we should not eat, and that we should not touch it, lest perhaps we die" (Gen. iii. 3). The moment a wicked deed is done, eternal death hovers over its victim. Every step, though it be in the whirl of the giddy dance, is nearer the judgment hall of God—how horrible that a man on the way to that judgment hall should add sin to sin at every step! The death penalty awaits him as he lies down to sleep, and it dogs his footsteps as he rises and goes about his daily work and play; and from his death chamber, as from the condemned cell of a murderer, his soul is dragged to the abode of the second and the eternal death (Apoc. xx. 14).

Consider the blindness of sinners, how their passions cloud their reason. For they are absorbed in vicious joys to that degree that they forget that they are insulting God to His face. A holy man once hearing a vile wretch blaspheming God, struck

him in the face. "Why did you strike me?" cried the blasphemer. "Because you insulted my Father." He answered: "But I do not know your Father." And the saint answered: "God against Whom you have sinned is my Father." So should we feel about all sinners, only that pity rather than indignation should overpower us. Well does the prophet exclaim on the part of God: "If then I be a Father, where is My honor? and if I be a Master, where is My fear" (Malachias i. 6). There are men who cannot be pilots of ships because they are color blind; they cannot tell green from blue or yellow from white. O the blindness of the sinner! He cannot distinguish good from evil; when he becomes rooted and grounded in mortal sin he is incapable of preferring heaven to hell. He is incapable of understanding what is meant by such expressions as ingratitude to God, or contempt for the cross of Christ. To him selfishness is superior to friendship, when the choice is between God's commandments and his own animal lusts.

The use of reason and the committing of sin have begun together. The brightening of mental development later on has only shown them the way to fouler depths of wickedness. In proportion as the sinner learns of God's goodness, he makes it a foil against God's justice; and so he goes on the more confidently in mortal sin. And presently it is said of him: He is dead! O the might of God has overtaken him! The last warning was sent to him; it was unheeded through mere habit; the fiat of divine justice followed swift and sure. Shall we not learn a sad, a terrible lesson from his fate? Let us not be above applying the prophet's words to ourselves: "Give ye glory to the Lord your God, before it be dark, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains; you shall look for light, and God will turn it into the shadow of death, and into darkness" (Jer. xiii. 16). Let us furthermore use no small part of this time of close union with God in beseeching His clemency to save the most impenitent, such as scoffers, the hard-hearted and hard-faced sinners, the lustful and drunken and

blasphemous and worldly. These He *will* save, if we be true to the inspirations of His grace during this holy time, and offer up fervent prayers for them.

Sin penetrates the soul as a needle does the body; for this will work its way for years, slowly and surely, till it pierces an intestine, or even the heart itself; it cannot remain stationary, for the muscles of the body are seldom quite at rest. In the soul's life no more than in the body's is there rest. Every wakeful moment is a busy moment of thought of affection or aversion, and of good or evil purpose—every moment until death. Death is the first moment of stillness.

Jeremias the prophet reproaches the reprobates of his day that "they have not known how to blush;" for shamelessness in sinning is a well-known deeper depth of wickedness. And the prophet adds: "Therefore shall they fall among them that fall" (Jer. viii. 12). Yet multitudes are positively vain of their mortal sins, and he that boasts of the most numerous and the darkest dyed is a prince among God's enemies. Such souls have lost the sense of difference between good and bad, and they look upon God's commandments as so many hindrances to the only joy of their lives—committing mortal sin. No delusion is more fatal than that Catholic faith may be counted on to remain true and intact after a prolonged course of vice has corrupted the heart. Gross self-indulgence, when rooted in habits of several years standing, causes the sinner gradually to make little of Christian principles. It is as common as it is amazing to find men shamefully vicious, who are at the same time bloated with intellectual conceit. They demand exact reasons for the plainest axioms of morality, whilst they wallow in the most degraded sensuality. The hot ferment of animal passions in the lower nature deposits a distillation of poisonous errors in their mind. We come across sinners who argue against a virtuous life even on their deathbeds.

And some of these have fallen from high places, just as did Lucifer at the beginning of all sinfulness; of whom our Lord



says: "I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven" (Luke x. 18). The same, alas, may be said of some men and women—let us not ignore the dreadful truth—who fall like Satan and like Judas from places near to God. Every Christian is a member of heaven's nobility, being even in this life a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, a companion of "many thousands of the angels" (Heb. xii. 22). But some among us are favored above others; these are in the higher and holier vocations. How deep is the malice that causes them to become traitors to Jesus Christ even in the cloister and the sanctuary. And as Satan fell, so such a one is destined to fall swift as lightning, to become a citizen of hell and a fellow-citizen of reprobates and demons forever. Yes, he who sins amid divine things passes into the slavery of the evil one rather from heaven than from earth. He is cast forth from the close company and the intimate friendship of Jesus Christ, stripped not of the ordinary privileges of the Christian state, but of those angelic prerogatives of which he was so utterly unworthy.

One hardly knows what mortal sin is till he realizes that it makes him a slave of the evil one. Riches, pleasures, honors, these are the prizes of Satan's school, nay, they are the very countersigns of his fearful warfare against God. What nation but is caught by such war cries as wealth and dominion? What good Christian but is deafened by them, and, alas, sorely tempted by them. Men under Satan's spell too often rule the world as if they were its creators. Men are willing to be the devil's lieutenants if they can but amass riches, or usurp dominion over their fellows. Poverty, humility, patience under sufferings, forgiveness of injuries, and all other Christian virtues, are deemed the badges of the pusillanimous. And men hail as truly great only those who make the object of life the gathering of wealth and the enjoyment of the pleasures of the flesh.

Let us never forget that Satan schemes to ruin the whole human race, to make all mankind enemies of their Creator, enemies and blasphemers of their Redeemer, just as he is himself.



No one is safe from his scheming, for he longs to behold all mankind writhing in the torments of hell, and strives to make each guilty wretch the author of his own downfall. In the courts of princes he endeavors to establish a universal scandal of lust. In the halls of lawmakers he lifts up a universal banner of perjury, bribery and ambition. By the press he would poison public opinion with falsehood, and destroy whole peoples with error and vice. He works incessantly in families and with individuals. There is not a wayside hamlet but feels his malignant plottings, not an idler at home, or a toiler abroad, or a little schoolboy, or a decrepit old man, who is free from his perverse meddlings.

Against all this array and marshalling of the evil spirits, the army of Jesus Christ advances. His banner is the cross, and His weapon is love of God and of man. Against mortal sin does Jesus array us, His faithful soldiers, armed with penance and love, humility and love, patience and love, contempt of riches and love, forgiveness of injuries and love, chastity and love—always love, love of God and of our neighbor, whatever other virtue may be called in to aid us. The banner of the cross is a symbol of love. "Behold," says the Lord God by His prophet, "I will lift up My hand to the Gentiles, and will set up My standard to the people" (Isaias xlix. 22). Under that standard we train, and at the beck of that divine hand, pierced for love of men, we march forth against mortal sin, some of us to hinder it personally, all of us to atone for it and to hinder it by our prayers. Into every family we, and those like minded with us, penetrate spiritually with our good angels to speak the thoughts of God. Into every place, high or low, do our prayers spread contrition for sin, love of Jesus Christ, holy hope for the future. Our victory over Satan and his hordes of bad men and of devils is assured. One of the principal ends of our retreat is to stand with God's holy angels yearning over this sin-stricken world, and praying to God for its salvation. Our fervor should be that of the prophet as he cries out to heaven: "All my bones shall

say: Lord, who is like to Thee!" (Ps. xxxix. 10.) Who is like to God, our God, our Savior, the Spouse of our souls. The answer to this noble battle shout, which was that of St. Michael and his hosts, is its own echo in our heart's love. But, alas, the one who commits mortal sin finds the answer in his heart's depravity. Who is like to God? This woman who is my partner in sin, she is like to God; this gold is become my God. He has passed under the dominion of the prince of sinners—the archfiend. By creation that soul was made like unto God (Gen. i. 26), and now he is made over again; vice is poured into him as a new blood into his veins, and he has become the image and likeness of his foul master: he is another self to the demon. What said our Lord of Judas Iscariot when Satan entered into him? "Have not I chosen you twelve? and one of you is a devil?" (John vi. 71.) So does every sinner pass from the beauty of another Christ to the hideousness of another Satan.

Christian sinners are, indeed, worse than the Jews who preferred Barabbas to Christ. Barabbas was a bad man, but he did not hate Christ as Satan does, and our Savior was glad to die in his stead. Therefore Jesus had that thought to console him when the Jews preferred Barabbas to Him. But the wicked Christian prefers the devil to Christ. He calls for the demon in preference to the Son of God, commands Christ to begone from him, and enthrones the evil one in His place—a being whose malice fills hell itself with horror. With him the sinner now lives in closest union; gladly does he accept his awful suggestions of wickedness, he harbors him as his guest, eats, sleeps, works, and plays with him, and bows down to him as his lord and master. And what is more, this is done deliberately, this cherishing and loving the devil himself in place of the Son of God, whereas the Jews preferred Barabbas because they were half crazed with passion. They did not know our Lord's divinity, they had no time to think or take advice, being swept quickly onward by a tide of

frantic race hatred. The Christian sinner very deliberately introduces the devil and his works into his soul. By often repeated acts of perfidy he expells from it the Savior Whom he acknowledges to be God Himself. His treason is a cold-blooded betrayal of one whom he knows to be God, and from Whom at the end of his life he expects to obtain the happiness of heaven.

O Jesus! pardon those false, those besotted hearts, and say over them the first words of Thy sermon from the cross, spoken over Thy murderers: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" (Luke xxiii. 34.) And, O Jesus, accept my most humble confession: I too have in my day banished Thee, Thou gentle King of all love and peace—I too have in my time banished Thee from my heart and installed the devil there. O my Sovereign Good, Thou didst desire to reign within my thoughts and affections, and I preferred that Satan and sin should reign there in Thy place. Why do I not weep tears of blood! How dare I appear before Thee after treating Thee thus? Pardon me, O merciful Redeemer, and pardon all other sinners. Bid the demon depart from them, and enter Thou into final possession of Thy own.

Consider the appalling danger of hardness of heart following upon a continuous course of sinfulness. The prophet admonishes the sinner: "By reason of the multitude of thy iniquities, thy sins are hardened" (Jer. xxx. 14)—packed down, as it were, one upon another, till tendencies and habits of sin become a well-beaten road. As a musician by steady practice learns a difficult piece until he plays it without notes, so by continuous indulgence in vice a man finally sins almost without temptation. There are multitudes who sin as if God no longer saw them; and these are Christians! In their secret hearts many of them half wish that there was no God. When the holy man Job foreboded that he himself might fall into that state, he said: "If God come to me I shall not see Him; if He depart, I shall not understand" (Job ix. 11). Thus

the wicked man, persisting in his evil ways, gradually becomes inattentive to God's comings and goings in his life, inattentive to the lessons of death, to the warnings of friends who speak in God's Name, regardless of God's stern whisper of remorse of conscience. We meet with persons who have been so long addicted to vice that they have no joy in anything else—virtuous conduct seems the dreariest existence. What ordinary sinners do only at long intervals and under powerful temptation, these do in sheer wantonness, and continually. In fact, there are many who can hardly think of anything but sin. This awful state is not an intrusion of wickedness as sudden as it is overmastering; it is a growth of years. The sinner in the beginning, having done his first evil deed, is scared, and before repeating it he waits and argues and dallies. But when he falls again it is because his sense of guilt is already blunted. Later on sin upon sin smothers all sense of guilt. O let us pity those degraded men and women who would gladly sin their lives long, and who yet trust to die a happy death. Our prayers and our sacrifices will save them, if we but offer them in the spirit of Calvary. Let us hinder them and curb them by invisible but resistless graces won by prayer, efficacious at all times, but especially so in times of Retreat.

A wound is a wound, but a neglected wound too often presages death, which is due not so much to the wound as to the neglect. In such a case the physician treats his patient in despair—just so a priest sometimes feels that he is dealing with a lost soul when administering the last sacraments to a sinner of a lifetime. There is a class of Christians to whom the admonition of à Kempis is addressed, and addressed in vain: "The time will come when thou wilt wish for one day or hour to amend, and I know not whether thou shalt obtain it" (*Imitation*, Bk. I., ch. xxiii.). How can one who for years has been ever on the watch for new ways of vice, turn in his last moments a longing glance of sorrow towards God? Only one answer is possible: our prayers must obtain for him a miracle of pardon.



## VII.

### COST AND COMPENSATION, OR THE NECESSITY OF PENANCE.

HISTORY tells us that the Emperor Theodosius caused his soldiers to put to death many citizens of Thessalonica under circumstances of great cruelty. In punishment for this St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, publicly refused him entrance to the cathedral of that city, bidding him go and do penance. The emperor was deeply moved; he shut himself up in his palace, clothed himself in penitential garments, and devoted himself to austere exercises of religion in atonement for his sin. One of his courtiers undertook to console him. But he answered: "Thou little knowest the anguish I feel. I weep and bewail my miserable condition. The Church of God is open to slaves and beggars, but its doors, and consequently the gates of heaven, are shut against me." Only when the severity of his penance had proved his sincerity, did St. Ambrose admit him before the altar.

This great emperor sets us a good example. It is necessary to do penance for our sins even after they are pardoned, nay long afterwards, in case our wickedness has been deep dyed, or long continued, or scandalous; or when our previous repentance has been shallow and followed by relapse. The holiest of bonds have been snapped asunder, those between a divine Father and His child; and when they are united, it is by a miracle of God's love. That miracle of pardon is His part of the reconciliation. Ours is first to thank Him for that great boon; but after that we must go into the seclusion of our heart, and there in deepest anguish live amid penitential thoughts and



prayers of contrition.\* Our souls are indeed at peace with our Maker, but wholly distressed as to the injury we have done Him by our sins. Among half-hearted Catholics this is a doctrine hardly known and never appreciated. They too often look upon mortal sin as breaking a divine law, that and nothing more; and they regard repentance as mending that broken law. The process, they agree, is painful, because it involves confession—just as breaking a bone is painful, and the setting of the fracture involves a painful wrench. But the personal relation between God and the sinner is frequently scarcely adverted to either in sinning or in repenting. The relation of Father and child, the Redeemer and the redeemed, is not considered. Thou hast done very wrong, O my soul—so does this man speak to himself—but if thou wilt only go to confession just this way and just that way, thou shalt be made innocent again. Thus religion becomes a sort of pious legalism: the sacrament of penance is a painful penalty, but it must be borne with because it is a commutation for the pains of hell. The way to get back into God's friendship is to be willing to be badgered by God's priest, threatened with eternal loss, squeezed small by the extortion of promises; all to be borne with lest worse should happen. Such is the unspoken feeling of many thousands of Christians.

This is indeed a willingness to be humiliated; but is it really repentance? Is it offering to God a truly afflicted spirit, a veritably sorrowful heart? (Ps. l. 19.) Is it likely to be followed by conduct showing "fruit worthy of penance?" (Matt. iii. 8.) Of course we, being devoted to a career of perfect love, do not belong to this mean-spirited class of Catholics. We do not think that confession consists in saying some words solemnly and with a pious feeling, having no more than a vague sentiment of regret, a process which is the sum total of the

\*"The best counsel that can be given to those who are touched with the spirit of penance, and are hindered from corporal austerities by feeble health or the duties of their state of life, is to apply themselves faithfully to the exercises of prayer, in which they will find abundant opportunity for practicing penance" (Father Thomas of Jesus, *Sufferings of Christ*, xii., Suffering).

repentance of so many outside in the world who are never better than half worldlings and half Catholics. We can say without presumption—can we not?—that we do not fall under the dreadful warning of our Savior: “Many shall say to Me in that day: Lord, Lord, have not we prophesied in Thy name, and cast out devils in Thy name, and done many miracles in Thy name? And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you; depart from Me, you that work iniquity” (Matt. vii. 21-23).

Yet there is some danger of it, at least remote, even among persons of our high vocation. Every one of us needs to take God into account most directly, most vividly, when he uses the sacraments, and especially to cherish better feelings of self-contempt, a sharp sense of ingratitude to our patient Redeemer, and of chagrin for having so basely misused His favors. These interior conditions, which, we are sure, always linger in the more retired regions of the soul after confession, are all too apt to be ignored. Penance tells us how to bring them into the foreground. Penance is a painful ardor of spirit to suffer inwardly and outwardly on account of our sins. It causes the bitter waters of contrition to flow full and deep through the caverns of our lower nature, cleansing them of the very dregs of iniquity still hidden there, whether in the form of evil tendencies, or of the penalty due to heaven after the guilt of our sins has been remitted. We learn this from the penitential spirit of the saints.

St. Peter of Alcantara began a reform of the Franciscans exceeding in severity the rule of that order, which is itself very austere. When asked why he went beyond the rule of the holy founder himself, he answered that he took the saint's life as well as his words for his rule. While others were content to live as Francis legislated, Peter willed to live and legislate as Francis lived. This strange fervor could only be shared by a small number of heroic souls—so one would think. Yet many thousands of men joined that reform, and strictly adhered to its austerities to the end of their lives.

We must distinguish clearly between the law and the law-maker. Mortal sin must be felt to be a personal offense against God. We do not practice ingratitude against a law, we cannot insult a statute book. Ingratitude is against a benefactor. And, in case of mortal sin, it is against our Creator, our Redeemer. Insulting God, betraying Jesus Christ, defying the Infinite Majesty enthroned among the angels, such is the meaning of sin to us when we are rightly guided in our repentance. How different is this frame of mind from the superficial sentiments of many Christians, who would prefer to deal with outward observances rather than to cultivate that feeling expressed by our Redeemer in our stead: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death" (Matt. xxvi. 38). During our Retreat, therefore, and especially during these its earlier days, we should make many a penitential excursion into our past lives, not to gather up sins to tell over again in confession, but to accumulate motives of sadness for our wickedness, to darken the false light of self-conceit with the shadows of Calvary as memory brings forward the scenes and circumstances and persons of former sinful days. That is penance, the very essence of it, the only sure preparation for the joyful days with which these holy exercises shall be closed. We must wander through the highways and byways of memory, saying constantly such words as these: By mortal sin I deliberately cast from me the grace of God; I willingly renounced the friendship of Jesus Christ; I enlisted joyfully in the fearful ranks of Satan's army and yielded up my soul to his sway; I deliberately chose to risk the eternal flames of hell, and I willingly turned my back on heaven. Nor is this altogether a pilgrimage of sadness. For as an honest man is glad to pay a just debt, though it deprives him of his money, so a penitent Christian is not without intervals of peaceful bliss. According to the Psalmist's teachings: "Thou hast loved justice and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Ps. xlv. 8).

St. Francis de Sales tells us that there are persons, who,

“though they renounce and avoid sin, nevertheless often look back upon it, as Lot’s wife did towards Sodom. They abstain from sin,” he continues, “as sick men do from melons, which they forbear to taste because the physician threatens them with death if they eat them.” The saint concludes by saying: “Souls that are recovered from the state of sin, and still retain these affections, are, in my opinion, like minds in the green sickness: though not sick, yet all their actions are sick; they eat without relish, sleep without rest, laugh without joy, and rather drag themselves along than walk. This is exactly the case with those here described: they do good, but with such a spiritual heaviness that it takes away all the grace from their spiritual exercises” (*Introduction to Devout Life*, Part I., ch. vii.).

Such is the effect of the lack of a great and vehement sorrow for past sins. The fatal languor of tepidity is due to this oftener than to any other cause. When mortal sin is viewed with aversion instead of hatred, virtue is viewed with sentimentalism rather than with love. “I ran in the way of Thy commandments,” says the Psalmist, “when Thou didst enlarge my heart” (Ps. cxviii. 32)—that is to say with a powerful and a violent hatred of my sins. The memory of them drives me to my knees before the tabernacle; it starts me on the Way of the Cross with a new meaning in every station. Amazement fills my soul as the past flashes its disgusting pictures into my holiest devotions, in which I behold myself parading under the black flag of the generalissimo of sinners. Little by little this bitter medicine totally cures within me the least tendency to palliate former wickedness, and the sovereign majesty of God is vindicated in all my faculties. The purification of the understanding is complete, and I am in a condition apt for the inspirations of grace. What does a doctor study? Not health but disease. What should a penitent study but his soul’s wounds? till by long-continued treatment their very scars are as wholesome as the untainted skin of innocence. What did our Savior think of? Was it not our sins? Does not the prophet say of Him that He lived amidst



men as one "alive amidst the dead?" (Ps. lxxxvii. 6)—always engaged with our redemption from sin and hell as His one all-embracing occupation. Of course, our reversion to the guilty past may go to extremes and lead to scruples. But with us whose training is mature, and for whom good counsel is always at hand, this danger is remote. On the other hand, there is danger of a soul remaining a pigmy in God's sight, solely because it does not know nor want to know and hate its former iniquity.

True repentance—how often must we be reminded of it?—is essentially an interior condition, dealing with affections and aversions, or rather loves and hates. This state of mind is the root of repentance. Contrition is a tree whose root alone is good to eat, and the leaves, blossoms, and fruits are given us to show where the root is and what degree of life it has. Disciplines and fastings and all bodily austerities, God knows that they are very good; but their worth depends on our inner humiliation and self-abasement. Emotional conditions may not always be present, for all natures are not equally moved to tears. A woman once came to a priest and told him that she had sometime before murdered her two little children. As she seemed quite unmoved during the recital of her dreadful tale, he said to her: "Why, woman, you seem entirely unaffected by the confession of such a crime; I don't see how you can sleep with the memory of it." But she answered: "Father, I don't sleep; I cannot show my feelings, and tears do not come to me, but the thought of my sin drives sleep away." Sincerity is not always tearful; its ardor often seems to dry up the fountains of weeping. Yet tears are a gift from God, and when granted to our penitence they are a sweet solace. Saints weep readily over their own past offences, and just as easily over the sins of others. May God grant us holy tears, and even such a surfeit of weeping that we shall complain to Him with the prophet: "How long wilt thou feed us with the bread of tears, and give us for our drink tears in measure?" (Ps. lxxix. 6.)

May God grant us an adequate knowledge of sin as it rules



men and nations, and as once it ruled ourselves. Such a knowledge of it as will make us fit to bear company with our Redeemer in the Garden of Olives, where He drank our sins into His very blood, and exclaimed: "My Father! If it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me" (Matt. xxvi. 39). O Christ in agony! give us a share of Thy horror for sin, and Thy broken-hearted sympathy for sinners. Tell us by the terrible reproaches of our conscience what it has meant for us to offend and to insult Thy Father and wreck our souls eternally, so that we may say as did Thy servant Job: "Fear hath seized upon me and trembling, and all my bones were affrighted" (Job iv. 14). This fear and hatred is, indeed, something more than natural, being such as consumes the days and nights of the lost; it is almost a foretaste of eternal doom, granted us as a preventive against future sin, but also instilled into our spirits to move us to timely works of penance. No dogma of religion is surer than this: if one would be close to God he must suffer. Yet how seldom is this actually realized as a solemn truth of faith, even by persons vowed to perfection; rather it is relegated to the take-or-leave region of religion. When shall we both know and *feel* that this word has God's authority: "Gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliations" (Ecclus. ii. 5). St. Philip Neri was persecuted long and bitterly by two renegade monks, who had managed to be placed in charge of the sacristy of the church in which the saint said Mass. At last he was tormented by them to that degree that he seemed driven to extremities, and he cried to God—for what? To be delivered from his enemies? Not so. "O my good Jesus," he exclaimed, "why dost Thou not hear me? So long and with such persistence I have asked patience of Thee, why hast Thou not heard me?" Thus do saints pray in a penitential spirit, not for deliverance from affliction, but for patience to bear it.

The love of God shown by suffering: this seems to be the sum of all methods of perfection, whether forming a general scheme, or the plan of a single day. What have you to do

to-day? A variety of things, some by law, some by charity, some for recruiting the forces of body and brain; and one day differs from another in the weight and worth of the deeds to be done. But remember that all days are alike in one thing: you must this day love God and you must suffer for His sake. A day without any suffering at all is not found in Christ's calendar. Perfection is the slow-moving miracle of man's assimilation to Christ by his sympathy for and his imitation of what happened Him upon Calvary. Our power of so thinking and so acting is the great standard miracle of our religion. Between the ordinary gift of miracles and the gift of willing suffering for Christ's sake, St. Chrysostom notes this difference: "In performing miracles I become debtor to God; in suffering for Him, I make God my debtor." All who believe in Christ must believe in the divine worth of suffering. An act of faith in the holiness of penitential pain is elicited from every true-hearted Christian when afflictions fall upon him, a faith close joined to a Christ-like act of love of God. Every suffering has this message to a faithful soul: Thou art a sinner, and I am come to help thee acknowledge it, and atone for thy sinfulness. Among Eastern Christians it is customary when entering a church to halt for a moment at the door, and bending towards the altar to repeat the words of the publican: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke xviii. 13). Might not each of us do the same as we pass the threshold of our convent, which is an institute dedicated to humility and contrition for sin?

Many years ago a little band of French missionaries went to New Zealand to convert the natives, at that time in a state of savagery. Presently word was brought them that the wild tribes were preparing to put them to death. At the same moment a British warship came to the islands, and sent a boat ashore to take off the missionaries and carry them to a place of safety. They refused to go. "But you will be put to death," said the British officer. "We do not fear death," said the superior of the missionaries. "Then in God's name what do you

fear?" exclaimed the officer. "We fear mortal sin," was the answer, "that, and nothing else." The one thing worse than death is sin. The supreme fear of a devout soul is lest it shall offend God mortally, and its supreme pain is its regret for having done so. It is hardly too much to say that the wisdom peculiar to our religion is knowledge of sin and its penalties and its pardon. One does not know life till he understands sin, repentance, and atonement. When shall we understand, with Christ Crucified, that the great fact of human existence is sin, and the great blessing of life is contrition—sincere, supernatural, supreme, and penitential contrition.

The ancient Councils of the Church imposed on sinners what were known as canonical penances, performing publicly what every true Christian feels to be his private personal duty, namely, the suffering of pain for sins forgiven in union with the Redeemer's infinite atonement of the cross. The primitive Christians, although their lives were filled with holy joys, yet loved to partake of "the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death" (Phil. iii. 10). The pagans were amazed at their austerities, and deeply offended. Such mastery of the carnal appetites was a reproach to their unbridled license; and on that account they proclaimed our ancestors in the faith to be enemies of the human race. The entire body of Catholic teaching concerning human joys and sorrows conveys an impression of a rigorous purpose on the part of Christians to train with Christ Crucified. The cross was from the beginning chosen as the symbol and standard of the true faith. No doctrine is more typically Catholic than that formulated by the Council of Trent, distinctly setting forth suffering as a Christian's dearest prerogative: "It is a blessed gift of the divine bounty, that not only can we render satisfaction to God for our sins by penitential works of our own choosing, or by those imposed on us by the priest in the sacrament of penance, but also that the painful visitations of providence, if we but patiently bear them, may by our union with Christ Jesus avail with God the Father

to the same end" (*Con. Trid.* sess. xiv., cap. ix.). The carrying out of this principle, which elevates our puny sufferings to the dignity of those of the Son of God, is absolutely necessary for Christian perfection. Those who aspire to love God with their whole hearts, must aspire to the crucifixion of "their flesh with the vices and concupiscences;" and the Apostle adds that this is really living and walking in the Spirit of God (Gal. v. 24, 25). The wickedness of sin must be known if our sorrow for it shall be adequate, and this knowledge is gained only by painful visitations of the Holy Ghost, Whose office is to "convince the world of sin, and of justice, and of judgment" (John xvi. 8)—visitations vouchsafed only to those who resolutely undertake the way of the cross. It may not be done with haste, it must be done under prudent guides; but it must be done. It is only a grieved, chagrined, and wholly disenchanted penitent, who shall offer himself to Christ as His fellow-sufferer in the Garden. And it must be one who regards his own flesh as his foremost enemy, that shall aspire to stand at Christ's side on Calvary.

A ready facility of penitential virtue is not easy to be had, nor when once possessed may it be counted on to continue without vigilance and steady effort. It is purely a boon from heaven, although one never refused to an earnest spirit. Entering the arena of perfection may be compared to the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Our Lord called to the four days old corpse "with a loud voice: Lazarus, come forth. And presently he that had been dead came forth, bound feet and hands with winding bands; and his face was bound with a napkin. Jesus said to them: Loose him, and let him go" (John xi. 43, 44). After Jesus calls me from death to life by my original vocation, I am unable to do more than struggle with the bands and fetters of my old habits and my native tendencies to sin. But if I will only steadfastly continue, then one by one these are loosened and flung away by my good angels at my Savior's command. Loose him, and let him go; inspire him with a love of fasting and of disciplines; show him the good of self-abnegation, of quick and



cheerful obedience. And at last the love of Christ Crucified is permanently established in my soul. In His own good time—St. Francis de Sales says that if one is faithful it will surely come, though we may wait for it till a quarter of an hour before death—in His own good time the Holy Spirit will complete our liberation from the bands of death, and will advance us unto the life of “a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. iv. 13). Constancy of heart is never unrewarded; and the hardest brunt of the battle is borne at the first onsets, when we struggle to be freed from the world and our relatives and our youthful ambitions. Then, go on intelligently; we have the plainest guide in our interior purpose, and our fixed rule of life to suffer for Christ and with Christ. “It is no easy matter to be the friend of Jesus,” writes Blessed John of Avila; “suffering borne for Him is the only good test which is the true and which is the false friend.”

Let no one imagine that a penitential life is a gloomy one. “Compunction of heart,” says St. John Climacus, “contains in it spiritual joy as wax contains honey. God in an invisible manner visits and comforts the heart that is broken with holy sorrow.” One might even go farther, and say that this is the only way that God ever visits us with joy, at least with joy of the deeper kind. The sweetest honey of consolation is always stored in the bitterest honeycomb of penance. And no man cometh to the Father’s joy but by Christ Crucified (John xiv. 6), by crucifixion alone do we claim a share in the bliss of His Resurrection, Who, “having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and Who now sitteth on the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. xii. 2). His final purpose for us, as it was for Himself, is joy perfect and eternal. If there were any better way of gaining it than by penitential suffering, He would have chosen it. “O my soul,” says St. Teresa, “do not seek to rejoice until thou hast first suffered” (Exclamation vi.).

The Apostles “went from the presence of the council re-



joicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus" (Acts v. 41). They rejoiced to be ill-used for Christ's sake. They felt better, slept better, were more cheerful and generally happy—nay, they were enthused with divine happiness because they had been hustled into jail by brutal soldiers, loaded with chains, arraigned publicly as criminals, and only dismissed after dire threats of death. Reach that state, O my soul. Be content when thou art ill-treated, crowded out of thy rights, bossed and bullied by superiors and inferiors, cruelly injured by malevolent tongues: pray to God that thou mayest reach the state of being glad that thou art in all this counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake and as a penance for thy sins. Art thou as yet far off from such virtue? After such like sufferings, dost thou not grow miserable, sleep uneasily, lose thy appetite, and feel and even look hurt, perhaps defiant? If so, then be sure that thou art as far off from real joy as from real perfection.

## VIII.

### THE MYSTERY OF SUFFERING.

ST. JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL tells of St. Francis de Sales sorrowing over the corpse of his mother: "He wept over his good mother more tears, as he told me, than he had shed since he had been a priest, but not tears of bitterness, 'for,' he added, 'it was a calm sorrow though a sharp one. I said to God like David: "I was dumb, and I opened not my mouth, because Thou hast done it" (Ps. xxxviii. 10). If it had not been for that, doubtless I should have broken out into passionate lamentations; but I dared not cry out under the blows of that Fatherly hand'" (From St. Chantal's testimony for St. Francis de Sales' canonization). A mark of sainthood is keen-sightedness in finding the hand of God in the vicissitudes of life. The place of suffering in religion, in repentance, in perfection, is not commonly enough known. The least known of all wisdom is the philosophy of suffering, a wisdom purely religious. Nothing is so hard to learn as the lesson of Calvary. "And calling the multitude together with His disciples, He said to them: If any man will follow Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Mark viii. 34).

This stern test of fellowship with Christ is expressed by Father Thomas of Jesus, as follows: "Thus Christ has declared in His Gospel that He will acknowledge none for His disciples but crucified men" (*Sufferings of Jesus*, xlii., 2).

St. Luke tells us, that when our Lord prophesied to His followers the fate that was before Him, "they understood none of these things, and this word was hid from them, and they understood not the things that were said" (Luke xviii. 31-34). This is a triple statement of a thrice-dyed ignorance

of the divine reason of suffering. Involuntary suffering they might have understood; but that He should be "offered because He willed it" (Isaias liii. 7)—a rebellious *no* was cast back at Him with triple emphasis.

The value of knowing the reason of suffering is that it mitigates the pain; it justified St. Francis de Sales in his calmness of sorrow; it is an incentive to assume pain for the divine reason of Calvary, and to praise it and to propagate it. Ignorance of the source of evil is almost an excuse for falling into it; if any excuse avails for flight in battle it is: We were ambushed.

The most complete misery is that which I cannot explain; it is like the fright from ghostly apparitions. A fit of causeless depression of spirits is often worse agony than anguish at a friend's deathbed. Reason demands a cause everywhere and of everything; the mind cannot work without material to work on; otherwise it acts like an engine spinning its wheels on slippery rails. The miseries of this life are insupportable only to one who will not perceive their origin and cause—the hand of God balancing sin with justice. This is not stoicism. "It is not," says Tauler, "that a man is inaccessible to all external emotion. No; certainly not. To be truly patient is to hold for certain that no man can do us wrong"—so brightly conscious are we of our deservings.

If the Apostles, on the occasion referred to, had risen to the resignation of faith, and believed, on their Master's word, that He must enter His glory only by suffering these awful things (Luke xxiv. 26), they would have obeyed Him intelligently, exactly; they would not have fled away ignominiously; Peter would not have denied Him; John would not have been their solitary representative on Calvary; their eyes would not have been bandaged by triple folds of misgivings, even after the Resurrection; Thomas would not have earned the ignoble distinction of being the doubting Apostle.

How different the case of Mary, who for her acceptance

of the mystery of suffering is crowned with the high title of Mother of Sorrows. She said nothing, but she believed all; listened and looked and believed; and then she suffered, indescribably, efficaciously, "That out of many hearts, thoughts might be revealed" (Luke ii. 35).

That much we can do, each in his place and measure, if we shall but learn the mystery of suffering, which is naught else than the bridge between sin and atonement. Then our abandonment to divine providence (in all the meanings of submission to God's good pleasure) would be a flow of sweet water from the deeper springs of consolation. And our love of Jesus Crucified would be perfect, for it would be sympathetic. The cause of sorrow is God's purpose to remit sin by an adequate atonement in which each of us shall have a share: "Wherefore Jesus, also, that He might sanctify the people by His own Blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth, therefore, to Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. xiii. 12, 13). The reason of the alliance of sanctification with suffering is sin, and the decree that "without the shedding of blood there shall be no remission" (Heb. ix. 22). The religious definition of suffering is this: It is the means of the sanctification of our souls by the painful mingling of Christ's Blood with our own. Herein is the secret of the mystery of suffering, both now and in purgatory, nay it is the secret of heaven's joy. St. Catherine of Genoa suffered acute physical pain in the latter part of her life. And it was said that her friends "beheld heaven in her soul, and purgatory in her agonized body" (*Life*, ch. xxxviii.).

We have an inkling of our relation to pain when we realize that sin is a hurt to nature; the terms abnormal, deordinate, disintegrating, are all descriptive no less of sin than of sadness. Know sin and you know suffering in its roots. Whatsoever is not known in its cause is not well known in its effects, is hardly known at all. Sin partly known is a violation of law and order; fully known it is a personal insult to the

Deity, a breach of friendship with the Eternal Father, meaning deordination, indeed, but principally bitter woe to the sinner.

The effect on an heroic soul of knowing this clearly is shown in the case of St. Catherine of Genoa. In her *Spiritual Dialogue*, she thus makes the soul address the body and self-love: "My brothers, I have come to know that God is about to do a work of love in my behalf, and therefore I shall take no more heed of you, your needs or your words. Under the appearance of good and necessity, you have well nigh led me to the death of sin. Now I intend to do to you what you have wished to do to me, and I shall hold you in no more respect than if you were my deadly enemies. Never expect to be on good terms with me again—give up all hopes of it. Yet I shall do all things in such manner that the necessities of each shall be satisfied. You led me to do what I ought not, in order to satisfy your appetites; and I will now lead you to do what you wish not, in order to satisfy the spirit. I will not spare you, even if you are worn out, even as you spared me not in so enslaving me that you did with me wholly as you pleased. I hope to bring you into such subjection to myself as to change your natures" (ch. ix.).

St. Thomas teaches that suffering is the absence of a necessary good or the impending loss of it; or it is the intrusion of evil or the impending coming of it. Now there is no human being at any time of his life in whom the co-existence of this cause and effect is not either established, or recently established, or impending. For in Adam, our nature's fountain head, "all have sinned and do need the glory of God" (Rom. iii. 23); all the innocent are liable to sin and dread it, all the penitent lament it: "And if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John i. 8). The whole race constantly suffers from the absence, real or possible, of its supreme need, the love of God: "For we know that every creature groaneth, and travaileth in pain, until now. And not only it, but ourselves also, who



have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption of the sons of God, the redemption of our body" (Rom. viii. 22). Mark the Apostle's last words, laying down sinfulness as the root of the body's pain. It is notorious that most men spend their whole life in seeking pleasure and shunning pain, never with full success, often with aggravation of their misery. How high a condition is that, in which happiness is not dependent on pleasure. "I used to say to Satan," relates St. Teresa, "when he suggested to me that I was ruining my health [by my austerities], that my death was of no consequence; when he suggested rest, I replied that I did not want rest but the cross" (*Life*, ch. xiii.). Until one feels thus about dying and resting he will make no great progress.

What then is our joy? It is the joy of penance. St. Peter of Alcantara appeared in a vision to St. Teresa after his death, all resplendent with glory, and he said to her: "O blessed penance, which has won for me so great a joy!" It is our only solid joy. Our joy is a sick man's joy in his medicine. We once heard a soldier of the Civil War boast joyfully of his left arm, which had been dreadfully fractured by a gunshot wound, and had been saved by a skillful surgeon extracting a section of the shattered and splintered bones between the wrist and elbow; he was proudly exhibiting and thankfully boasting of a boneless and almost nerveless arm and hand. But it was an arm, nevertheless, a real limb of flesh and blood, and infinitely better than none at all. A wounded man's joy is in the sharpness of the surgeon's knife, and a Christian's joy is in the sharp knife of sorrow for sin, that pain of contrition which cuts deep and true to his heart's core. "To my hearing," cries the royal penitent, "Thou shalt give joy and gladness, and the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice" (Ps. l. 10). Believe in that joy; crave that joy of God; accustom yourself to the joy of mending your thoughts by painful efforts; of thinking of sin and of suffering and

atonement as unified under the cross; of sympathizing with the Redeemer; of bearing the pain of submission to the divine will as the counter-pain of mental or bodily suffering. Do all this and go on doing it by reasoning and by method and by habit, till at last you can do it by instinct. One must systematically use spiritual means and measures until he becomes simply saturated with this doctrine of the correlation of sin, pain or joy, if he would go on smoothly towards perfection, which is "justice, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xiv. 17).

Fail not to use the same plan for bodily joy, which if rational and Christian, must square with that of St. Paul: "I now rejoice in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell within me" (2 Cor. xii. 9). We find joy in the soul's sores by curing them with the salve of the commandments, adding the unction of the counsels of perfection for the period of convalescence and to secure entire recovery. Consider this: if one persists in sin, he suffers as a mere penalty; if he repents, he yet suffers, but joyfully as an atonement.

Joseph was the name of a Christian priest who suffered martyrdom under Sapor, King of Persia, in the fourth century. Being fearfully scourged, and seeing himself covered with his own blood, he lifted his eyes to heaven and joyfully exclaimed: "I return Thee the greatest thanks in my power, O Christ my Lord, for granting me this favor, washing me in my own blood by a second baptism and cleansing me again from my sins" (See *Butler's Lives*, March 14). It was a favorite saying of Father Hecker, that the spirit of the martyrs was needed in our day and country for the spread of the true faith, for that alone, he insisted, forms the missionary type of character.

Love is the source of all joy. Suffering in atonement for sin is suffering for love. Love is just, and so by suffering makes up to the Beloved His losses by sin. And this form of love takes rank before other forms. Be just before generous; pay your debts before you give to the poor; be penitent before

you are heroic. The head of our race is Christ, and His office is as personal to each as it is universal for all: "I would have you to know that the head of every man is Christ" (1 Cor. xi. 3). Now the trysting place of each and all of His members is Calvary: "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all things to Myself" (John xii. 32). Suffering has lifted Him up and enthroned Him; we must know suffering in order to range ourselves beside Him. What love equals that of Christ on the cross! What love is so sorrowful, what sorrow is so lovely! What joy is so quickly got and so surely held as that of the loving sorrow of the cross? "For the love of Christ presseth us: judging this, that if one died for all, then all were dead. And Christ died for all; that they also that live may not now live to themselves, but to Him that died for them and rose again" (2 Cor. v. 14, 15). Is not this a joyful solution of the problem of suffering?

What man does to God when he commits sin is one thing; what he causes God to do is another: the Crucifixion of His Only-begotten Son. By sin God is by His very nature compelled to remove love from the throne of joy and place it on the throne of pain, for justice demands this. By sin man does this to God: he seeks joy without love, therefore a sensual joy, an avaricious joy, the joy of hate, of sloth, the joy of pride, disobedience and rebellion, the joy of the beast or the demon which feeds the love of the degenerate child of God. But this joy of the wicked shall perish, and it will be followed by the reaction of sadness, just as is the case with the joy of the drunkard. Conscience rises like the stern prophet before the sinful king of Israel, and stands and points and threatens, and pronounces awful words of doom. Then follows doubt, dread, shame, rage, foreboding: pain in its worst form. This form of suffering is without God in the world and without hope. The other form is the suffering of the penitent: "And David said to Nathan: I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Kings xii. 13), and forthwith "his tears be-

came his bread day and night" (Ps. xli. 4), till the prophet's message of pardon: "Thy sin is forgiven thee" had penetrated to his deepest soul with its message of joy.

Our consolation is, therefore, a product of courageous suffering. Perfect joy we cannot have here below, and yet a good meed of repose of mind is sure to come by the postponement of unmixed joy till we enjoy it with Christ in the next life. "If He," says St. Augustine, "Who came into this world without sin, did not depart hence without scourges, how shall they who have lived here in sin not be deserving of scourges?"

A very sweet joy is that which submerges all carnal, all rebellious joys, and is content to rejoice in the more spiritual faculties, with a pleasure perceptible only in the finer sensibilities. Of a devout penitent of his St. Vincent de Paul said: "It is nothing to see her in health; you ought to see her in sickness if you would learn her soul's quality."

This love of suffering is unknown to the worldling, for whom suicide is so often the besetting temptation under incurable disease. And yet men often sneer at the Christian's exercises of self-subjugation as self-torture, as inhuman, morbid, gloomy. But what of the self-torture of the man who practices vice, or of one less guilty, but not less foolish, who wears away his life in the pursuit of money or of power? Not self-torture alone but self-destruction it should be called, the destruction of the good self by the bad self. The self-chosen suffering of the Christian is just the reverse; it is the painful inner process of the enslavement by the good self of the bad self, done in union with Christ Crucified. This is the surest joy of a rational existence, the only outlet for the noble longing of the spirit towards perfect bliss. St. Teresa says that the only remedy for the tedium of a long life, is to suffer for Christ's sake: "What medicine hast Thou, O God, for such misery? There is none, save to suffer for Thy sake" (Exclamation xiv.).



"The thought possessed me that in order to obtain heaven it was necessary to give up the earth"—the testimony of St. Bernard, and a very simple truth. It is the main truth, after all, of our divine doctrine, as far as that doctrine tells of means to an end. But not for obtaining heaven alone is abandonment to holy pain efficacious, for it bestows on its adepts the mastery of the earth. During the many years that that same St. Bernard's life, attenuated by years of religious asceticism, hung by a thread, he chained to God's will whole nations of men.

He was a marvelous combination of both the contemplative and the active spirit, showing how both work together unto joy. For the contemplative saint provides himself with food and sleep and clothes and shelter only sufficient to ward off death; because the nearer he is to expiring the closer is his view of God, his only joy. The saint of the active life makes barely sufficient provision of necessary bodily helps to ward off the collapse of his physical powers—the nearer he is to fainting the better does he enjoy the consolation of his labors for souls. One can see how easily the two types may blend into one. The ordinary good Christian barely keeps within the Church's penal laws of fasting and abstinence; and even he has no small sweetness of devotion; for the motives of all true Christians are identically those of Calvary.

"A soul that is full," says the Wise Man, "shall tread on the honeycomb; but a soul that is hungry shall take even bitter for sweet" (Prov. xxvii. 7). How accurate a statement of the two conditions. When sated with an over-plenty of every good thing this world can offer, the soul disregards the heavenly banquet of the Holy Spirit. When dry and hungry, the least thought of God tastes sweet. Even the anger of God is a boon to a soul that is angry with itself, for it is the anger of a father; it bestows first filial fear and then joyful love.

What, then, shall I do about joy and suffering? The answer depends on your attitude of mind about sin and its



divine Victim. What think you of Calvary, whose joy is there? What think you of Christ Crucified, what joy is His? In seeking for joy place yourself face to face with the God-man injured by your sins, and realize that the penalty is measured by the *lex talionis*, a life for a life. But in paying this penalty, bear in mind that you instantly recover your own life enriched and ennobled by Christ's.

Let us conclude these thoughts on the mystery of sorrow and joy by Newman's profession of faith in the Catholic principle of asceticism: "O my Lord Jesus, I believe, and by Thy grace will ever believe and hold, and I know that it is true, and will be true to the end of the world, that nothing great is done without suffering, without humiliation, and all things are possible by means of it. I believe, O my God, that poverty is better than riches, pain better than pleasure, obscurity and contempt than name, and ignominy and reproach than honor. My Lord, I do not ask Thee to bring these trials on me, for I know not if I could face them; but at least, O Lord, whether I be in prosperity or adversity, I will believe that it is as I have said. I will never have faith in riches, rank, power, or reputation. I will never set my heart on worldly success or on worldly advantages. I will never wish for what men call the prizes of life. I will ever, with Thy grace, make much of those who are despised or neglected, honor the poor, revere the suffering, and admire and venerate Thy saints and confessors, and take my part with them in spite of the world" (*Meditations*).

## IX.

### DEATH.

"Suffer both to grow until the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers: Gather up first the cockle into bundles to burn, but the wheat gather ye into my barn" (Matt. xiii. 30).

WE are to meditate on death. Let us begin by thanking God that He has placed us in the way to eternal life, withdrawing us from the peril of an unhappy death, or at least the imminent peril. For if we but love God fervently, holding fast to our rule of life (Apoc. iii. 11), nothing can snatch from us our immortal crown. Why then should we fear? "What love of Christ can that be," exclaims St. Augustine, "to fear lest He come Whom you say you love? O are we not ashamed to say we love whilst we add that we are afraid of His coming?"

But turn and look! See the vast numbers of our fellowmen who are wicked and unrepentant, nay, who grow worse and worse every day. Wickedness sinks deeper and deeper into their lives through continuance in vice. Practice makes perfect. Bad practices make men perfect in sin, until at the "time of the harvest" they are hopelessly depraved. We priests meet sinners so hardened that on their deathbeds they answer an invitation to confess with insults and blasphemies.

The Wise Man says: "They that glory in evil things grow old in evil" (Ecclus. xi. 16). We meet with those who are so wicked that they boast of their vices. One sin, committed at first only occasionally, naturally leads to another—then custom is established. Custom in turn begets necessity, until finally the judgment becomes so warped that the sinner is often unable even to admire virtue in others. There are men in plenty who become set and hardened in sin for ever. The history of many a life

may be thus described, and its end forecast: sin, habit, necessity, blindness of mind and inveterate hardness of heart. The end is the harvest of death: "Gather the cockle into bundles to burn."

But thanks be to God, a good life, such as we are, as it were, compelled to lead, grows better and better every day. One feels at first the practice of religion to be tedious and cramped. But presently the soul grows freer; virtue tastes sweeter and sweeter as time goes on. A peaceful conscience reveals its treasures of tranquil joy. Vice is seen in its hideous reality. The manliness, dignity, and reasonableness of being good becomes fully known. And above all God places in the soul, constantly fed by the graces of the sacraments and prayer, an intense love for Jesus Christ. After a few years, temptations that were once overpowering, are trampled under foot without hesitation. Virtue strikes deep roots in the soul. There is a steady growth of faith in God, confidence in Jesus Crucified, and a plain perception of the interior guidance of the Holy Spirit. Virtue is become not easy, but necessary, fruitful of an indispensable joy. And when the harvest time comes, when spiritual maturity has been reached, the soul's Lord and Master says to the angel of death: "Gather the wheat into My barn."

St. Francis de Sales says: "It is a great reproach to beings doomed to die, that death should come without their having thought of it beforehand." It is doubly a reproach to those who reject the thought when it is offered to them. Here is a journey which must be made, and our Savior tells us we may be called on to set forth suddenly: "At even, at midnight, at cock crowing or in the morn" (Mark xiii. 35), and we act as if we were to stay here forever. Not so those who are sincerely devoted to God's service, for every day they have some calm but fervent thoughts about death. "Pray for me," wrote such a one to a friend, "that love may be the death of my body and the life of my soul."

Who counts the days between life and death? The convicted inmate of the prison cell. Perhaps, also, the man to whom the

physicians have announced that his disease is fatal. Yet neither of these reckons the remaining time of life more carefully than a Christian who aspires to perfect conformity with Christ. In preparation for Communion, he hears his Master's words, "My time is near at hand, with thee I make the pasch with My disciples" (Matt. xxvi. 18). To a wise disciple of Christ every Communion is a viaticum, just as the Last Supper was to his divine Master. "Oh, the gladness of life and the sadness of death," says the beginner. "Oh, the sadness of life and the gladness of death," says the proficient. "Oh, the gladness of life and the gladness of death," says the perfect Christian, wholly conformed to the Divine Will. "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Therefore whether we live or whether we die we are the Lord's" (Rom. xiv. 8).

Our Redeemer spoke of His death as "My time" (John vii. 6). So do I regard the last days of my career as especially my property. No hour of life is so certainly my own as that in which I surrender everything, all that I am, all that I have, to God. Oh, Jesus! I claim that hour with a miser's eagerness; in it shall be payed the last installment of my debt to Thee. Looking forward to it, now I beg Thee to accept it benignantly, to accept it personally, to receive it Thyself, Thou and Thy Blessed Mother.

My end is fixed and certain, but God's Church bears me in her motherly arms towards the gates of death, and God and His Saints and His graces and His truth are always with me. Thank heaven that if in my last hour my sins shall rush in upon me, so also shall Christ's mercies, and with triumphant force they shall possess my soul with hope and love.

Then will the wisdom of a fervent life be fully demonstrated. We do not sin mortally, at least we cannot persuade ourselves that we do; we are not foul with vice, nor are we a snare to others, nor steeped in hypocrisy. But we lack generosity with God, we play fast and loose with the inspirations of His grace, or we huckster with Him in paying our debt of penance; we are

self-indulgent; we are cold towards His servants with whom our lot is cast unless they happen to be our favorites; and we hold aloof from our superiors and censure them. How ill all this will look when the divine mandate comes to us: "Take order with thy house, for thou shalt die and not live" (Isaias xxxviii. 1). Which of us shall feel like doing as did St. Turibius the Apostle of Peru? He ordered that the messenger who brought word that his physicians despaired of his recovery, should be given a present. He was not afraid to place his life under the divine scrutiny, therefore the news of his death was welcome to him.

A charitable rich man is glad of his riches because he can give them away to the poor, and he sees this not purely as charity, but also as a duty. In the same light a devout Christian, in hearty good health, should regard his physical force and powers of endurance. If he offers them as an oblation to God in view of his death, in union with the death of Jesus Christ, with an overpowering sense of reality, he has received a grace of no ordinary value. Alas few of us do this; while in robust health we look upon our death without the least emotion, except when death takes from us some dear friend. Then a sudden shortening of life's perspective causes us to feel as if we ourselves were at death's door. But this is too often but a passing sensation.

"Have the gates of death been opened to thee," asks the patriarch Job, "and hast thou seen the darksome doors?" (Job xxxviii. 17.) Until thou hast entered into death as into a secret chamber of meditation, and hast sat for mournful hours pondering its sad but most truthful lessons, thou shalt not have knowledge of God and of sin and of salvation. St. John the Almoner, Patriarch of Alexandria, had his grave half dug, and on the more solemn occasions of his ministry he required one of his officials to stand publicly before him and exclaim, "My lord patriarch, thy grave is unfinished. Be pleased to order its completion, for thou mayst need it at any moment."



Take the whole life of a man here and hereafter, and the time between the birth and death of even a centenarian. It is, after all, but a brief interval filled too often, alas! with sins and vanity and deceits. Yet the small fraction of it that is called the hour of death is the summary of one's whole earthly career, and it characterizes the eternal years of the future. In a bad man it is usually evil with everlasting portent. "Evil men and seducers shall grow worse and worse" (2 Tim. iii. 13). The offer of God's mercy to them is too often fruitless. But to this awful rule there are, thanks be to God, many exceptions, the first, the greatest, and the most consoling being the repentance of the good thief. May not I also hope for pardon who, with all my defects, am now, and for many years have been, a true friend of Christ, looking to Him in my need and to the glory of His kingdom.

Holy Writ says of Abel: "Though dead he yet speaketh" (Heb. xi. 4). This is true of every corpse. Have you not learned lessons of resistless force from the silent orator in his coffin. The day comes when you yourself will enter that forceful pulpit, and those who have perhaps disregarded your words in life will be moved by your silence in death. Shall your teaching be a lesson of edification? Shall they say: "His good life was crowned by a holy death?" Or shall it be a warning: "He was careless of religion, and now he is face to face with God." Preparing to die is preparing to preach to our survivors, and the one only topic of that discourse shall be the vanity of transitory things.

The Emperor Charles V., who ruled over half of Europe in the early part of the sixteenth century, after many years of war and glory, saw by the grace of God the emptiness of all earthly ambition, and stepped down from his throne and entered a monastery to prepare to die. On one occasion he had the monks celebrate his funeral rites. His coffin was set up before the Altar, and he himself was among the mourners. He heard his name chanted as among the dead; he saw the coffin lowered into

the vault. It deepened within him the sense of the vanity of all human greatness, and the sole and supreme dignity of divine things. Death teaches us with a mighty force. Let us in imagination often attend our own funeral, saying with Job, "Behold now I shall sleep in the dust and if thou seek me in the morning I shall not be" (Job vii. 21). When our Savior was on the eve of His death, He prayed for His disciples, saying: "Sanctify them in truth" (John xvii. 17). His death was to be for their sanctification in truth; and so shall our death be for our sanctification if it be piously united to His. To give up my body to death by daily intention because "It is appointed for men once to die" (Heb. ix. 27), is to make good the word of the Apostle: "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. iv. 3). The daily pilgrim to the grave alone understands himself and God; he alone understands the difference between his immortal soul and his decaying body. St. John of the Cross says: "The first thing that a soul must have if it would attain to the knowledge of God is the knowledge of itself" (*Maxim* 299). This knowledge of self is the primer of wisdom's heavenly school, yet strange to say many who bestow most care upon their bodies have least knowledge of them, their uses and their end, and scarcely any knowledge of their souls and of God. As St. Francis de Sales says, men mostly "have too much body and too little spirit" (*Letters to Religious*, Mackey, p. 432); it is shown by their choice between joys corporal and joys spiritual. Can anyone be more pitifully ignorant of his own interest than he who volunteers to be the slave of his body, yet such is the ignorance and folly of the self-indulgent. Those who never miss a rich feast for their bodies' joy, plume themselves as sensible men, and rate mortified Christians as simpletons. Many would-be followers of the Crucified are only "wise according to the flesh" (1 Cor. i. 26). God guide us, God guard us! For the insinuations of carnal wisdom are as incessant as those of pride, and almost as deceitful. St. Augustine warns us that "we ought to take food in the same way we take medicine, and with equal

moderation and discretion." And he but echoes the more radical saying of St. Paul: "They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences" (Gal. v. 24).

In offering our death to God in union with Christ's, we have a privilege superior to that of the angels. Oh, Jesus, by Thy death Thou didst save me and ennoble me, and by my death I save myself and honor Thee, dying in union with Thee and for the very same purpose—to pay the penalty for my sins. How greatly hast Thou favored me, oh, Jesus, by enabling me to exclaim with Thy Apostle: "With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Gal. ii. 19).

Death is a terror to all living men except the Saints. Yet Jesus loved death, and has made His death the principal object of our adoration, the great event of His life. And His Apostle's example teaches us that a Christian's longing for death should brook no rival sentiment except zeal for the saving of souls. "I am straitened between two; having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, a thing by far the better. But to abide still in the flesh is needful for you" (Phil. i. 23, 24).

So when a devout Christian can no longer serve his fellows, or when he feels that God is beckoning to him from on high, then his indifference to death is changed into a consuming desire to pass into the bosom of God. St. Chrysostom said of St. Ignatius the martyr that "he could lay down his life with as much ease and willingness as another man could put off his clothes." A poor woman dying in a charity hospital was nearing her end. The priest said to her: "Are you resigned to die?" "Father," she answered, "I am poor, I have always been so, and my clothes are poor; and I give up this body of mine as easily as I would change an old dress." One of the surest of graces, granted by God to all His friends at the approach of death, whether they be penitent sinners, or guileless innocents, is an entire willingness to die, though death be a wrench of agony, to be followed by the crossing of the threshold of the divine judgment hall.

"You are dead," the Apostle admonishes us, "and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3). A man who is dead by anticipation is not surprised at the actual coming of the fearful visitor.

It is no small privilege to be able to discount in death so immense a debt as that of life itself. Oh, God, if my life be hid from men and their applause and blame, hid by my own self deliberately and entirely with the purpose that it may be passed more exclusively in Thy company, then the summons of death will have no fears for me, and with Thy Apostle I may say: "We had in ourselves the answer of death, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God Who raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. i. 9).

## X.

### JUDGMENT.

How various are our feelings as we think of death. To a pious Christian who is suffering from illness, it is a happy release from pain. To a soul burdened with sins unconfessed, unforgiven, it is a dark abyss, the thought of which he instantly expells from his mind. But good or bad, we all know that we are all moving ceaselessly along a street that ends in a court room, where Christ is enthroned as Judge, and where we are to be arraigned for trial. Alas that so many of us add fault upon fault, as step by step we shorten the distance between us and the stern glance of our Judge! Moreover, this awful preparation for our trial goes on under the continual observation of the Judge Himself, for as Job says: "Doth He not consider my ways, and number all my steps?" (Job xxxi. 4.)

To the carnal man our future state is covered with darkness and enshrouded in the mists of death. Who shall guide us in its ways and show us even its nearest borders? Every Christian has within himself the guide book of Eternity in his own conscience. His memory has been God's pen, with which He has inscribed upon the tablet of his soul the narrative of his life, with all its good and ill. Each conscious act, word, or even thought is written there, to be rigidly inspected finally by Him Who made the record. Death is the door which leads into the court room of Jesus Christ, our Creator, our Master.

"The kingdom of heaven," says our Lord, "is like to a king who would take an account of his servants" (Matt. xviii. 23). Not seldom the accounting begins without any warning, except the constant reproaches of conscience; the example of others snatched quickly away; the admonitions of devout friends who echo the language of the Holy Spirit: "Man knoweth not



his own end, but as fishes are taken with a hook, as birds are caught with a snare, so men are taken in the evil time" (Eccles. ix. 12). Look at your physical system, how complicated it is, and how easily it may break down; for every organ there are various mortal maladies. Look about you. The world you live in is filled with menaces of destruction. Death says, "I own the air you breathe; I sow it with evil pestilence as a farmer sows his field with grain. I own the earth you tread, and it conceals my fatal drugs. I have secreted poison in half the plants of the meadow and woods. I have the choice of a thousand ways of killing you. I command a vast army of accidental fatalities. Both open and secret are my battles against your life, and never yet have I lost a battle?" Such is the proclamation of death. "Behold the Judge standeth before the door" (James v. 9). Death is the door, the Judge is Jesus Christ. Yet, oh, my God! I go on full of self-complacency, with absolute assurance of the future. My King will never come, *my* accounts will never be examined. Can it be that God's word is true for *me*? "The Lord trieth the just and the unjust" (Ps. x. 6). Oh, Jesus! I have many defects, but none of them is so full of criminal folly as my ignoring the future citation of my soul before Thy awful tribunal. I deeply deplore this neglect, I promise to amend it, especially in my examination of conscience, which from this moment shall no longer be a mere formality, but a genuine anticipation of Thy dread scrutiny. No more counterfeit self-accusations. I will call to my side my guardian angel, destined to support my spirit, when it shall quail under Thy all-seeing eye, and I will beg him to share with me his knowledge of Thy justice, and his knowledge of my weakness.

Then indeed I shall know, not alone the foulness of my great sins, but the meanness of my little sins. For how often have I done and said trifling things, as I forced myself to rate them, which nevertheless were most unbecoming in a person of my holy calling. On that day I shall know the guilt of a bad temper, and taste the bitterness of remorse for uttering words wounding to

the feelings of others. How would it sound—that hot, angry answer of mine—if spoken over my dead body in God's judgment hall? Well does the Wise Man say: "In all thy works remember thy last end and thou shalt never sin" (Ecclus. vii. 40).

St. Peter Fourier has said that in writing letters self-love drips from our finger tips into our ink, and through our pens on to our paper. How few of us realize that by tongue or pen we are incessantly drawing up evidence for or against ourselves at the divine tribunal according to the warning of Jesus Himself: "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. xii. 37).

The soul stands alone before the Judge. Let the body sleep on, it is weary enough, but for the spirit the sleepless ages of eternity now begin. They begin with the judgment of its whole life by Jesus Christ, Whom it has lovingly worshipped or malignantly blasphemed. He stands robed in awful majesty, and He penetrates the soul with fear. Ah! now is seen the difference between the things of time and the things of eternity, for in the coffin, enwrapped in rottenness, is all that is of the world, "the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John ii. 16). And all that is of God is brought by the soul from the world into the light of that divine Face. The very least thought of sorrow for sin, or sympathy for Jesus Crucified, or trust in His merits, or love of one's neighbor for His sake is there with its claim of everlasting merit.

The soul is covered with unforgiven sins as a body might be with ulcers: with spiritual sores which are now incurable forever. Alone, the soul must meet the Judge. The soul of a prince shall be as solitary as the soul of a swineherd; a master of twenty languages shall stammer out his answers as foolishly as an idiot. Wealth and honors are left behind, and only the works of love or of hate are now left to the soul. The guilt of unforgiven sins sinks deep into the soul, there to burn eternally.

The sinner caught in the snare of his own sins feels, rather

than hears, the dread announcement: "I am the Lord Who searches the hearts, and proves the reins; Who gives to everyone according to his way, and according to the fruit of his devices" (Jer. xvii. 10). Oh, culprit soul at the tribunal of God, He knows all. He saw thee in every one of thy sins, for thou wert under His very eye when thou didst offend Him. He touched thee—His almighty hand was on thee, though thou knewest it not: His hand was on thee, His heart was turned against thee. The Heart that overflowed with kindness for the sinner during so many years, that sent so many warnings and pleaded by so many inspirations of grace, shall plead for its love never again, is done with warnings, and sits now upon the terrible throne of justice. And the angel of record proclaims: "Now therefore stand up, that I may plead in judgment against you before the Lord, concerning all the kindness of the Lord which He hath shown to you" (1 Kings xii. 7). The Scripture says of the wicked man, that the devil shall stand "at his right hand" (Ps. cviii. 6) claiming his own, clamoring for that soul, whose innermost thought for so long gave hearty and entire welcome to his foulest suggestions, whose every sense and faculty was willingly subject to his allurements. How awful now is the monster's gladness in his victory!

How different shall be my case (I humbly trust). How joyful will I be that Jesus Christ shall be my Judge, since my soul shall be all alive with love of Him. He is infinitely wise, therefore He reads my heart's loyalty to Him, as it breathes forth its timid yet confident greetings: "I found Him Whom my soul loveth, I held Him and I would not let Him go" (Cant. iii. 4). He is all powerful, therefore He is mighty to save me; instead of fearing His power, I am glad of it. For the love of Jesus tempers the dread of the impending trial, and soothes the soul's anxious fears. With the yearning cry of the Psalmist it turns towards the Judge: "Say to my soul, I am thy salvation" (Ps. xxxiv. 3). Lord, didst Thou not die for me? Have I not loved Thee as my salvation, and thanked Thee for Thy promise

of heaven most sincerely? Now that I am helpless before Thee let me not perish. "What a boon it will be at the hour of death," exclaims St. Teresa, "when we are going we know not where, to think we are to be judged by Him Whom we have loved above all things, with an ardor that has crushed self-love" (*Way of Perfection*, Stanbrook, ch. xl., 7). How blessed the lot of that soul, who when he is cited to that fateful court may say truthfully: "Lord Jesus it is many a year since I willingly committed even a venial fault against Thy love; I have persevered to the end; may I not ask of Thee the fulfillment of Thy promise? 'Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life' (Apoc. ii. 10). Oh, Jesus! great has been my guilt. I confess that at times I have been a vile sinner against Thy law and Thy light, and Thy adorable Self. But when my enemy cries out against me, Thou shalt be my defense, I will point to Thee and say: 'He loved me, He delivered Himself up for me' (Gal ii. 20). Thy Blood, oh, Jesus, has ransomed me, Thy Spirit has long since accepted my repentance. The thought of Thee, my Savior, has been my mainstay for years; it has tempered my prosperity and comforted my adversity; the remembrance of Thy love on Calvary has aroused my sloth unto prayer and unto work; it has overflowed my soul with thanksgiving, it has consoled me in my doubts; it has flooded my death chamber with the yearnings of blessed hope."

"Depart!" or "Come!" A simple word is spoken, and eternal joy or woe has begun. "Depart!" Not: "Thou hast failed, but I give thee leave to try once more, armed against thy weakness by the memory of this day." No, not so, but thus: "Thy time of probation is past and gone forever. Although the world shall last yet thousands of years, not one moment of them all shall be thine. Many times over hast thou been pardoned and given further opportunity to love Me—never again. Dishonor and suffering and bitterness of spirit are thine forever. 'Depart!'"

When the joyful word, "Come!" is spoken, the Son of



God causes the soul to behold, as in a noonday sun, the infinite goodness of God expended so lavishly upon it during its whole life, eliciting an adoration and love more rapt than the earthly ecstasies of any Saint. At the same time the happy soul beholds its good works shining with heaven's light, for our Lord has said: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, . . . . for their works do follow them" (Apoc. xiv. 13): all works and words and desires which spring from love of God and man, even the least, even those that were forgotten, even such as the soul doubted were praiseworthy. Then what seemed life, a weary round of spiritual exercises, will be seen as a great ladder reaching heavenwards into the Heart of Jesus, luminous with angels ascending upwards with the soul's merits, and coming downwards laden with God's plentiful graces. Then shall be realized our Savior's promise to souls "without guile." "Amen, amen, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John i. 51).

Consider attentively those two words of our Lord, "Depart" and "Come." The moment they are spoken thou art saved or lost, for He Who speaks them is thy divine Judge. What thou hast done settles thy fate for eternity, not what thou shalt do. Millions of sinners shall be saved in the future; thou, now or never. Thou shalt henceforth be unspeakably happy with God's own happiness, or unspeakably miserable with thy own unchangeable wickedness.

And now let us meditate briefly on the second judgment of God, the last or general one, which affirms the particular one, and promulgates its sentence to the whole world. As the body's destruction immediately preceded the individual soul's first arraignment before God, so shall the destruction of this material world go before the second arraignment, which is that of the entire race of man. Our Savior has prophesied it with much detail, beginning with the destruction of the universe: "And immediately after the tribulations of those days, the sun shall



be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be moved" (Matt. xxiv. 29). What a lesson this is of the vanity of all worldly things.

Judgment day has come, the last prayer has been offered, the last crime committed; the last hour is struck. The death sentence of the human race is uttered, for the end of the world is at hand. The heavens have passed away, the earth has been scourged by fire, that universal conflagration whose fierce rage is foretold in many parts of Holy Writ. "The day of the Lord," exclaims St. Peter, "in which the heavens shall pass away with great violence and the elements shall be melted with heat, and the earth and the works that are in it shall be burnt up" (2 Peter iii. 10). This busy world has been covered with flames and becomes a scorching desert, a dark and vacant orb wheeling through space. No sound of human voice is heard, nor voice of bird or beast, no dash of the waves of the sea, nor rippling of the waters of the streams; not a blade of grass nor a leaf of a tree is left. Our beautiful globe is now a vast solitude, a heap of ashes; let it perish! But no, for it is a shrine of God's love; it is the grave of His Saints and of His faithful children; it is about to be used as the hall of His justice.

The hour is come. The darkness is pierced by a gleam from above, steadily brightening like the dawn of a new day, till in the midst of dazzling splendor the form of an angel is seen approaching the earth. "And I saw another mighty angel," says St. John, "come down from the heaven. . . . and his face was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire. . . . and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot upon the land. And he cried out with a loud voice" (Apoc. x. 1, 2, 3). St. Paul speaks of this divine summons as the trumpet of God calling men to judgment: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall rise again" (1 Cor. xv. 52). Arise ye dead and come to judgment! The dark vaults of hell resound with this command,

and its inmates are driven forth upon the earth. Arise ye dead and come to judgment! Purgatory ceases to be, and its penitent souls, glorious now with their perfect atonement, appear upon the earth. Arise ye dead and come to judgment! Heaven suspends its happy anthems, and its millions and millions of happy spirits, in awesome expectation, wing their flight downward to the universal assembly of their race. All mankind must hear their Sovereign Master proclaim their eternal destiny.

As these souls in their countless myriads touch the surface of the earth, each one draws to him the ashes of his body, as the lodestone attracts the filings of steel, "for the dead shall rise again incorruptible" (1 Cor. xv. 52). Behold the races of mankind mingling together for mutual judgment and for final farewell. Behold the friends of God serene and beautiful, arrayed in the habiliments of heaven, passing in and out among the monstrous forms of the enemies of God.

Let us pause to consider how rightly God claims the general judgment of all mankind assembled publicly together, since in no better way can He vindicate His honor. Every sin of man is a shame to God, Who is man's Father and must feel the disgrace of His children. The honor of God is openly profaned by sinners, flagrantly so by certain classes of them, such as blasphemers, apostates, drunkards, wicked parents, unnatural children. These and all other sinners seem to defy God in their lifetime with immunity. His honor is, therefore, entitled finally to a public vindication. Furthermore, God's servants merit a public vindication, for they have been laughed to scorn by the impious. If a man forgive his enemies for Christ's sake, he is derided as a coward. If he is strict in the observance of the Ten Commandments, he is laughed at as a fool. If he follows a retired, prayerful life, he is called a misanthrope. If he yields up his rights to others for Christ's sake, he is scoffed at as mean spirited. Now the great day has come when these faithful followers of Christ shall be vindicated. They shall be publicly exhibited not only as the friends of God, but as the only

true men, the real type of our race and nature. With the end of the world comes the end of the criminal folly of the wicked, and the justification of the wisdom of Christ's faithful adherents. Behold then the shame of the lost! We are told that what criminals most fear on the gallows is not the agony of death itself, but rather the shame of being hanged in public. It is worse than death to the guilty wretch to come out before the great mob, pinioned, bareheaded, the hangman shoving him forward, the gibbet looming overhead. So shall it be with every lost soul at the end of the world. St. Basil says that the shame of the judgment day will be a worse torture than the fire and darkness of hell itself.

Who can picture the misery of hypocrites on that day, and of those who have caused others to sin. Men seldom sin alone, though they may seem to do so. The most hidden wickedness does some harm to the sinner's fellowmen, if only indirectly. It is just, therefore, that finally secret vice should be publicly unveiled. The last judgment is indeed a time of woe to secret sinners, a day of doom to hypocrites.

Two men were once in hot dispute, when one took up pencil and paper and began to write down what the other was saying. Instantly he stopped talking; and then said with much agitation: "I will not stand that, I will not say another word." Our conscience writes and pictures thus all our deeds and words with the truthfulness of God, so we carry in our own souls the principal witness of our good and evil, which is to be fully exhibited at the last day. "The Lord searcheth all hearts," says Holy Scripture, "and understandeth all the thoughts of minds" (1 Par. xxviii. 9). At the day of judgment He will make that prerogative common to all men—we shall know one another as God knows us.

In our vocation of perfection every sin is doubled by one of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy complicates the malice of other sins, deepens it, deceives men and outrages God. It is the meanest of vices, it makes one's life a living lie. At the last judgment

it shall be allotted its full share of ignominy; on that day we shall be seen even as we are. Our Savior says of hypocrites and liars: "Without are dogs and sorcerers, and unchaste and murderers and servers of idols, and everyone that loveth and maketh a lie" (Apoc. xxii. 15). The reckoning of that awful day awaits liars and whisperers and mischief makers—the pest of communities and the ruin of families, wrenching asunder in hate those whom God has joined together in love. An awful day of manifestation and execration of sneaking sinners and underhand evildoers shall be that day of doom.

Christ's sentence will close the judgment day. Oh, let us not dwell on the sentence of eternal wrath launched against the wicked when the terrible arraignment is over. Please God *it is not for us*. Let us each and all humbly beg of the almighty Judge: "Let my heart be undefiled in Thy justifications that I may not be confounded" (Ps. cxviii. 80). When the sheep shall be divided from the goats, let us trust that we shall be placed on the right hand of the Son of Man, that we shall look upon Him with perfect gladness, and respond quickly to His words of everlasting life: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you" (Matt. xxv. 34). Dost Thou bid me come to Thee, oh, Jesus, Thou beloved of my heart? My eager ambition, my only joy, these many years has been to come to Thee, to remain with Thee forever. Now I hear Thy words of invitation, "Come, ye blessed," now I see Thy gracious arms outstretched to receive me. "Thy voice is sweet, and Thy face comely" (Cant. ii. 14); yea, Lord Jesus, I come to Thee. Thy love shall be my joy throughout the eternal years; Thy Father's house my abiding place forever.



## XI.

### ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

"Between us and you there is fixed a great chaos, so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither" (Luke xvi. 26\*).

CHAOS will one day divide the human race—chaos; vacant, silent, immeasurable space, with neither earth beneath it, nor sky above it. On one side the bliss of Paradise, and the friends of God; on the other, torments and flames, and the enemies of God in eternal banishment. What a terrible fate. What horror can compare with the least possibility of such a fate. How business and pleasure and ambition fade away into foolish dreams, in presence of the thought of damnation; and how sin takes on its real aspect, for sin is the monstrous shape that opens the door of hell to us, and closes it upon us forever. Let us feel in spirit that fire; let us look into those fierce and hateful countenances; let us listen to the blaspheming voices of the immense multitude of the lost, and draw therefrom lessons of fear of God, and desire for heaven.

To meditate thus has been the sad task of the more thoughtful men of every race from the beginning of the world. The eternal separation of the good and evil spirits has been a dogma of every religion, false as well as true. It was the belief of the

\*The complete text is this: "And the rich man also died, and was buried in hell. And lifting up his eyes when he was in torments, he saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried, and said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. And Abraham said to him: Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus' evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is fixed a great chaos, so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither" (Luke xvi. 22-26).



ancient Hindoos in the dim ages of that earliest people. The sacred books of the Persians record the doctrine of eternal punishment before the days of Abraham, and so do the monuments of ancient Egypt. The Greeks and Romans were the most enlightened nations of antiquity, and in their degeneracy they had every reason to desire that iniquity should escape future retribution; yet their mythology teaches eternal punishment in a thousand places, and that dread belief was taught even by their philosophers, who scoffed at the mythology and the superstition of the common people, and yet accepted the doctrine of the eternal separation of good and evil souls hereafter. We find it taught by Greek and Latin poets, historians, orators, and legislators. Indeed, the few leading pagans who refused belief in eternal retribution, usually denied immortality altogether.

It seems to have been inseparable from every enduring and widely-diffused religious belief in human history. Hell has a name in every tongue, ancient or modern, a place in every widespread system of morality. In our own times the sects which reject it are few and dwindling; and usually skeptical of other articles of religious belief. Why this common consent—as it may rightly be called—upon a religious tenet so unwelcome to sinful humanity? Perhaps God has supernaturally interfered to preserve this confession of His sovereign justice amid the ruin of faith in so many other truths of His original revelation. Or perhaps it is an inevitable conclusion from sound reasoning, and witnesses to humanity's native feeling of the absolute difference, here and hereafter, between good and evil. Men are constantly passing into eternity, some of them full of evil, others of good; and reason affirms that conditions so radical shall be considered permanent till evidence is given of a change. What is so essentially different as a bad spirit and a good one?—essentially, absolutely, eternally different. There is as much difference between the bad and the good in this life as between hell and heaven in the next. This is one reason why men have made the existence of eternal punishment a universal dogma.

Some take refuge in the thought of a future probation, by means of which men bad in this life become good in the next. But this delusion is founded on no revelation of God, backed by no experience of human turpitude, derived from no process of reasoning. If men will be wicked for fifty years, how can you know that they will cease to be wicked after fifty centuries? Is not this life long enough for a fair trial of men's good will? Do men grow morally better in the process of sinning? And how, may we ask, is a period of probation which is *certain* to end in virtue, compatible with men's free will? The problem of the existence of evil and its future punishment is not without its difficulties; but how do you lessen them by transferring from time to eternity the change of a free soul from sin to repentance?

Others, relying on visionary interpretations of some texts of Scripture, abolish hell by substituting the annihilation of sinners at the point of death—a deeper mystery than hell itself. Annihilation is an insufferable, unthinkable mystery. And as a matter of fact, can either of these theories have been the true one all the time, whilst during long series of human generations every class of teacher, pagan and Hebrew and Christian, has taught the contrary?

You know that the Church of Christ stands or falls with this dogma, as venerable in the tradition of the ages as it is terrifying to human depravity. It is dogmatic Catholic truth that there is a hell in dire reality; that its pains are eternal; that impenitent sinners are there imprisoned at the moment of death; and that the penalties they suffer are various in accordance with their various guilt.

We need hardly dwell on the Scripture proofs, so numerous, so plain, so universally distributed through a book so true and so divine that it has God for its author. We could cite literally hundreds of passages. Call the text of the discourse, in which Jesus Christ, the most loving heart that ever beat, the sinner's dearest, most constant and most patient friend,

declared to the unrepentant and reprobate souls in hell: "Between us and you there is fixed a great chaos, so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither." It is the fiat of infinite power, sitting in judgment upon souls who have deliberately and finally spurned the advances of infinite love.

We are far from saying that there is no mystery here. But the nearer we approach God, the more do His infinite attributes overwhelm us with mystery. If God's justice were the only mystery, we should indeed be confounded. But is it so? Is that awful place a greater mystery than Calvary? Is infinite love less amazing than infinite justice? From whatever side we approach the divine majesty, we meet with incomprehensible truths. Look at that gibbet at the gate of Jerusalem: it is dripping with the blood of the God-man dying for sinners. Tell me, can you explain *that* more easily than the spectacle that appals us as we gaze into hell? What, again, can compare in mystery with the criminal folly and the deliberate malice of an instructed Catholic calmly risking hell, year in and year out, for the sake of some disgusting self-indulgence?

Mystery or no mystery, we must accept God's teaching through His Church. Whether it pleases us or not, we know that He is responsible for Catholic doctrine. Now divine truth is one. God's plan of time, eternity, reward and punishment is one. God, conscience, the reality of good and evil, probation here and recompense in joy or sorrow hereafter, the Atonement of Christ and its criminal rejection by mortal sin—all the facts and events and dogmas of religion make one inseparably connected body of doctrine. The Garden of Eden, Sinai, Bethlehem, Calvary, the valley of the judgment, the prison of Gehenna, are all one revelation of the single purpose of the one God to save men. They are all an offer of infinite love by the Supreme Ruler of the universe, to be accepted or rejected freely, and with due recompense in weal or woe in either case. Notice, then, that the denial of eternal punishment is usually a sign of universal

doubt. It means the rejection of God's Church, the denial of the inspiration of Holy Scripture, of the Divinity of Christ, and that He died for our salvation, or that we need salvation, and too often ends in the denial even of the guilt of sin and human immortality. Christian faith, on the other hand, accepts all, and so it must be. I cannot be a Christian and take Christ's teaching piece-meal, picking and choosing what pleases me and rejecting the rest. And, practically speaking, we know that if there is any way whatsoever of dealing with God through conscience, it is based on the belief that as sure as there is a God, He has a plan of future rewards and punishments, both equally eternal. Reasoning minds, therefore, have all but universally given eternity as a quality no less to future punishment than to future rewards.

Let us now consider the nature of the punishment of sinners hereafter. We know that hell is banishment from God. But that means from God's love, for from His presence there can be no escape, nor from His power: "If I descend into hell, Thou art there" (Ps. cxxxviii. 8), exclaims the Psalmist; even in hell art Thou with Thy awful justice, with Thy everlasting reproaches. This it is that generates in the lost soul the essence of his suffering. Whatever else engages him, the thought of God is never absent, especially the thought of God's goodness. A moment's consideration reveals the torment of this mental state.

You know that mortal sin is turning away from God, as a soldier treacherously turns away from his colors and his country to join the enemy. Now, this aversion from God is always an insult to God, and is often openly contemptuous and presumptuous, a preference of something utterly vile, such as sensual indulgence, love of money or ignoble sloth. In hell this contempt of God will be turned into terror, aversion will be hardened into hatred—hatred of a Being that the reprobate knows is worthy of infinite love. No other suffering in hell can equal the sense of degradation of a Christian finding himself hating



Jesus Crucified; and with this horrible feeling of hating God is the sinner's realization that God hates him—the final, complete conviction that he is and must ever continue to be an object of profoundest aversion to a being infinitely loving. This fills the lost soul with a tumult of horror. There rages forever within him a torrent of baffled rage against God, of hate of the divine goodness, of blasphemous reproach against God. Something like this it is that is called the pain of loss. The reprobate soul has lost God as friend, and found Him (O how many times had he been warned that he ran the risk of it!) as judge, as executioner, as the stern adjuster of right against wrong. The power that keeps the fire burning him, that keeps alive the worm of remorse gnawing at his vitals forever, is the power of omnipotent deity, eternally, irrevocably vindicating His love, so long despised, so many times set aside, coldly and calmly, even with ridicule and scoffing. Now forever and ever the lost soul seeks to match God's infinite justice with an infinitude of hate.

Can you conceive a worse torment? Did you ever hear of a deeper horror? The more that soul suffers, the more he hates God; the more he hates God, the more he loathes himself. God—this is his thought—is infinitely good, and I hate Him with every atom of my being; Jesus Christ died for love of me, and my inmost soul burns with hatred for Jesus Christ. I hate Him with deliberate, unchanging, defiant hatred. A thousand times over He offered me His love and I refused it. I loved women and drink and money better. I rejected His love; and now He forces His justice upon me and I must accept it, and I must and I do return it with hate. I must curse Him, and I do curse Him forever. O well does our Lord counsel us to fear not anyone who can inflict death of the body, but rather to fear "Him Who hath power to cast both soul and body into hell" (Luke xii. 5). Yet this can never happen until our own malice has earned it.

Coupled with this fierce conflict of the soul with its own better self—a war never interrupted, never to be followed by



peace—is its equally constant longing for the happiness of heaven. Think of a soul engulfed in hell, and yet never ceasing to long for heaven. What words can describe the misery of being shut out from Paradise: the loss of that glorious region we call Heaven, a place abounding in every beauty, its joys exceeding the brightest dreams of youth, the deepest yearnings of old age, all perfectly adapted to our nature, absolutely fitted to enrapture beings of our nature, “prepared for you,” as our Redeemer proclaims, “from the foundation of the world” (Matt. xxv. 34). Reflect what it will be to realize the full bliss of such a state, and, at the same time, to be buried in a place of torments originally made for the devil and his fallen angels (Matt. xxv. 41). To be shut out from Paradise by an irrevocable sentence; to be excluded from the perfect enjoyment of God, and of Christ; the sweet familiarity with the angels and saints in their bewildering variety of glory and of love; to be denied the least access to them, the most remote sight or sound of them, yet never to be able to forget them, nor cease to long for them while furiously cursing them; dwelling in the company of demons, the most ferocious, the most cruel of beings, and associated eternally with men and women the most abandoned, the most malicious.

Closely allied to this aspect of the pain of loss is the full realization of eternity. During every pain in hell, the lost soul breathes in and out the thought of eternity as if it were a mental fire. “Depart from Me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire” (Matt. xxv. 41)—these are the words of eternal farewell at the day of judgment. Eternity! To the infinite mind of God it is an everlasting present; to Him there is neither past nor future, only eternal *now*. Not so to the created mind. The reprobate soul must wearily count over every hour of a succession of hours that never shall end. Number the drops of water in the ocean, and mark a hundred years for each drop; then add (if you could) all those years together; and now imagine (if it were possible) the myriads of millions of ages

it would all amount to. To the infinite God it is nothing, not a brief half hour. But what would it be to me in such a place as hell, knowing as I must, while each moment wearily passes away, that when at last those myriads of millions of ages were done, my punishment would be no nearer its end than at the beginning.

Here, then, as is commonly supposed, is the seat of that awful state of mind we call despair. But I know not if it be so. The poet says that "Hope springs eternal in the human breast." Will not the reprobate suffer from delusive hopes of deliverance, an unbidden, unreasonable, dreamy expectancy of his being for some reason or other made an exception and saved at last? Delusive indeed, yet rising by instinct of nature only to torment and mock the soul more cruelly.

An army officer who lost his right arm in battle returned after a prolonged absence to the service, apparently quite recovered, but soon he resigned. "It is all right," he said, "when things are quiet; but if any danger or excitement arises, I feel the ghost of my amputated arm moving and pointing and waving in the air—it gives me an insufferable torment." So will the frightful delusion of hope, the very ghost of hope, torment the sinner. In his lifetime he presumed on God's mercy, he abused the divine patience; in hell he shall suffer accordingly.

Eternity! O let us place those words *never* and *forever* on one side, and on the other the sum total of our sins, and strive to realize what they should mean to us to be forever damned; never saved.

O what a fool, what a monster of folly, to run the risk of spending eternal ages in such a place. Prayer would have saved him, and instead he blasphemed God; Mass would have saved him, and Confession and Communion, as they did save many of his bad companions, but he made a joke of such things, and he kept on in his wickedness. How often was he warned—and in vain; how many times did his very sins sicken him, and yet he returned to them.

The gnawing worm of memory, as our blessed Savior calls it (Mark ix. 45), that faculty which makes the lost soul's life before and after death one, forces him to live his whole life over again—the drunkard in the saloon, at home in the midst of his children whom he is deliberately ruining; the libertine amid his evil company; the gambler with his cards; the sluggard amid his criminal neglect of holy Mass and of the sacraments. The reprobate miserably thinks over every hour of his existence; committing every sin over again; recalling every act, word, thought of malice or of foulness, all with the vividness of a memory preternaturally acute. Such shall be the thoughts of his mind throughout eternity. In memory he shall see his parents and his other devout friends, whose good example he disregarded, although they are far away in heaven, and he shall hear them again reproaching him as they did in life and weeping over him; he shall see and hear them in a dreadful memory forever and forever.

But enough, perhaps too much, of this terrible subject. Let us lift our eyes and our hearts away from the deep pit. It is not to be our dwelling place. No, the blessedness of heaven shall be ours. However much the envious demon may call up my sins against me—they are long since forgiven. However much he may invoke God's wrath against me, I invoke His love in my favor, I trust in His mercy with absolute confidence. I know that my Redeemer says of me, poor penitent sinner though I be: "Because he hath hoped in Me, I will deliver him: I will protect him, because he hath known My name" (Ps. xc. 14).

Let us also do what we can to save our fellowmen from hell, and if we can do little else, let us at least pray. We can at least weep and mourn with the Savior of the world over the loss of so many souls for whom He died, lamenting with Him that for them His blood has been shed in vain. Who that loves God and Christ can behold the dreadful prevalence of mortal sin, without sorrowfully exclaiming with the prophet: "I looked upon the transgressors, and I pined away because they kept not Thy word" (Ps. cxviii. 158).

## XII.

### TEPIDITY AND VENIAL SIN.

THE difference between mortal sin and venial sin is essential, absolute; it is the difference between an enemy's hate and a coward's love; or, again, between a timid friendship and total indifference. But a timid friendship toward God often becomes indistinguishable from moral cowardice. A silent friend is of little use in a crowd of howling enemies. Vanity and human respect, self-conceit and greediness, forgetfulness of the comfort of others, vulgarity and uncouthness, ill-temper and blind antipathies, gossiping and rash judgment, petty lying, the attributing of unworthy motives and harboring of suspicions, the multiform sin of indolence, and all symptoms of moral degeneracy, extending often over nearly every wakeful hour of life; even such a widely-distributed outbreak of weaknesses is no more mortal sin than the itch is the small-pox. For mortal sin, as its name indicates, is the death of divine love in the soul. Worse than the death of the body is the loss of the love of one whose love is our life. How often do men and women seek death by suicide when, by some gross wickedness of theirs, the love which they covet has been turned to hate. By mortal sin the love of God Himself is forfeited, and that love is the soul's life.

But venial sin holds to the divine lover, though it be with but one hand. It violates no grave commandment, or if it does, it does so by accident, and lacks deadly guilt by lacking full advertence. "There is a kind of advertency," says St. Teresa, "which is very deliberate, and another so sudden that to commit the sin and to be aware that we have done it, seem one and



the same thing; we hardly realize what we are about, and yet to a certain extent we are aware of it." And then the Saint characteristically adds: "But from willfully committing any sin, however small, may God deliver us" (*Way of Perfection*, Stanbrook, ch. xli., 3). By this lapse, due to want of vigilance, love is not lost, but the power of proving it by the practice of virtue is weakened, and the soul that once was active is now heavy with cowardice. Like our Savior's watchers at Gethsemane: "He found them sleeping for sorrow" (Luke xxii. 45).

A really bad heart debates little about the difference between little sins and great sins; passion, self-indulgence, self-interest, proud aversions, all rush in regardless of the protest of a conscience stupefied by the loss of sanctifying grace. In a good heart there is, also, small debate about the difference between great and little sins, but here love sweeps onward, clearing out of its road every obstacle, little and great, indiscriminately. Such a one when he falls is like the man spoken of by the Holy Ghost, "that slippeth with the tongue, but not from the heart" (Ecclus. xix. 16). A soul determined to do the whole will of the Beloved has little use for casuistry.

It is a miserable thing that so many ordinary and well-meaning Christians should make so little of venial sins. It is as if one said: "Oh, that rash on my skin is nothing, it is only the itch; no one dies of the itch; if it were small-pox, ah, that would be truly alarming."

We must not think that venial sins arising from weakness, nervousness, ignorance, or half-scotched microbes of former moral fooleries, can by any cumulative force crowd one's soul into the ranks of God's actual enemies. Not by any means. Yet the case is different with grosser venial sins, where deliberateness is full though the matter be light; or where a settled complacency has smothered the protests of conscience; or where the faults are committed, not in dribbles but in torrents, habit assuming that place of majesty which belongs to sanctifying grace. Even such a state may not be one of mortal



sin, but although ten thousand mosquitoes are not equal to one rattlesnake in venom, yet a single one of them, as modern science demonstrates, may infuse the germs of yellow fever into my blood. Therefore the whole scheme of true service must consist in purifying our minds from palliations of mortal sinfulness, and limiting venial sins to occasions of surprise and in-deliberateness.

Tepidity is venial sin, reduced to a recognized system; and it may be defined as contentment of mind with keeping out of manifest mortal sin. The signs are slackness about ordinary religious observances—slackness of principle; readiness to dispute the claims of obedience; readiness to argue against a strict obedience to a rule of life, especially the practice of mental prayer and spiritual reading. A growing discontent with one's state of life, and with the holy rule of law, becomes chronic, placing one always on the downward side in differences and disputes about practices of fervor. Then begins self-justification by falsely-applied maxims: "One must not be fanatical;" "Let us go forward by degrees;" "Common sense is true spirituality;" "Many things in the lives of saints are to be admired rather than imitated;" "After all we are not living in the Middle Ages;" "Beware of singularity;" all true in themselves and having their use among fervent characters, but the very deceits of Satan in a tepid man's mouth.

Downright grievous sinners the tepid are not, but deliberate venial sin is their established custom. They practice virtues of the cheaper kind; they are patient, when there is nothing to suffer; gentle, when uncontradicted; humble, when honor is untouched. They seek to acquire virtue without mortification, are willing to do many things, but not to take the kingdom of heaven by violence (Faber's *Growth in Holiness*, p. 468). Such are the tepid, and of such our Savior says: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would that thou wert cold or hot. But because thou art. . . . neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth" (Apoc. iii. 15, 16). It is hardly

too much to say that such a frame of mind is hateful to God, because it is an irritating attempt to serve two masters; because in most cases it is a relapse from a state of fervor; because it is man's stinginess flung in the face of God's generosity.

The tepid man is without spiritual motive, engaged in good living simply when and where it is easy. His habitual disregard of the grades of guilt in venial offences may easily be succeeded by a more serious obliquity: "He that despiseth small things falleth by little and little" (Ecclus. xix. 1). Venial sins that are squarely deliberate put an instant stop to spiritual progress, for spiritual progress consists precisely in reducing little defects to the region of indeliberateness, and elevating motives of virtue into the region of love. When conscience proclaims the deliberate commission of a venial fault to a fervent soul, penance immediately follows, almost automatically—a necessary condition for resuming spiritual advance. A single act of self-indulgence or of self-will, if done squarely with wide open advertence, effectually stagnates the waters of divine love flowing into the soul. "A slight failing in one virtue," says St. Teresa, "is enough to put all the others to sleep" (*Life*, ch. xxxvi., 16).

De Ponte affirms that tepidity is a form of the capital sin of sloth, and in the shadow of approaching death is "near neighbor to hell" (*Meditation on Sloth*). There are jugglers who exhibit their skill in throwing knives. They set a man up against a wide board several paces distant, and then cast knives at him, so as barely to miss him, and just to avoid killing him, never quite touching his face, neck, and breast, but fixing the knives close about him on the board. So that spiritual juggler, the tepid Christian, makes a target of his soul. He skillfully avoids the fatal stroke of mortal sin, but he indeed juggles with eternal doom. How woefully different from the finer motived spirits, who have a real terror even of manifest imperfections. They never indulge in bitter sarcasm (Faber says that "from the beginning of the world until now sarcasm was never less than a venial sin"); they never heap ridicule on silly or faulty

friends, nor spend hours in idle reading or chatting, nor do they ever procrastinate with duty. In these fervent spirits has grown a rooted incapacity to do anything secret or mean; a settled conviction that their loyalty to God must be valorous. They look to Him with solid trust to grant them final perseverance, and to that end ever to increase their horror of mortal sin.

The sloppy tendencies of the tepid render them constantly liable to fall fatally. For, as St. Gregory the Great says: "It comes to pass that the soul accustomed to light transgressions has no horror of more serious ones. Fed and nourished by these lighter faults, such a one finally arrives at a state in which he imagines he may have attained to a sort of prescriptive right to commit them. Losing all fear about lesser sins, he at last gives up fear about greater ones" (*Liber Pastoralis*, Part III., ch. xxiii.). Limiting one's efforts merely to abstaining from grave sins, when it becomes established policy, signifies a stubborn interior refusal to go forward in the practice of virtue.

The love of Christ always urges us to better things (2 Cor. v. 14); standing still is therefore a rejection of grace. To stand still might not be so unworthy, but we stand still whilst we hear Christ saying: "Come, follow Me" (Luke xviii. 22). No disciple is true who in answer to his Master's word: "Forward!" says: "I will not go backward, it is enough for me to hold my own." But he will not hold his own, he will go backward.

A lukewarm soul in the midst of those who are called to perfection is a standing menace to the fervor of all. His example is a picture of complacent cowardice, and it is especially injurious if he happens to succeed well in external works. He is like a derelict ship, one which is water-logged and abandoned, yet floats on the high seas, offering fatal facility for collision to good ships. High views of honor and of valor in the service of God are the foundation of our hope against venial sins. A fervent soul is as eager to avoid petty faults as a lukewarm soul is to avoid mortal sins. This is the plain road of perfection. It is far removed from the temporizing and compromising spirit

of half-hearted Catholics, who are so numerous as to form a great world of moral tepidity, enveloping and threatening to overwhelm high principled men and women. "If you wish to be directed by the Spirit of God, listen no longer to the world," says Fénelon. Small offences become great in our eyes as God's light grows bright within us; just as the sun when rising reveals to us the clear outlines of objects of which we had but a confused perception in the night-time.

Add to this the love of God's standards of loyalty and the practice of penance, and scarcely any root of offence can long linger in your heart. The best penances are the more appropriate ones—to protest to God and ourselves against uncharitable words by begging the pardon of the one offended; to punish overfeeding by underfeeding at the next meal, or neglect of spiritual exercises by doubling them later on. Penance and penalties go together, and their efficacy is far in excess of their difficulty. Even the feeling of penance, which is the sense of wearing the garb of God's states prison, is not without benefit. Shame upon thee, let us say to our soul, that thou shouldst dream of heavenly joys since thou art smirched with such earthly stains as bad temper or indolence. The Venerable Baronius relates that once, when very ill, he had a vision. He thought he had died, and that his soul was being carried to heaven. Then a terror came upon him, for he saw that certain venial sins still spotted his innocence. "Oh, Divine Majesty," he cried, "before entering Paradise let me first pass through the fires of purgatory, for I could not endure Thy awful holiness whilst these faults are unatoned for." Such lights are not unknown to devout spirits in this life, and they induce penitential exercises calculated to anticipate the fiery purgation of the future life.

For advancement in the guilelessness of Christ, we must join to the penitential spirit the love of prayer. The Holy Spirit teaches: "He that loveth God shall obtain pardon for his sins by prayer, and shall refrain himself from them, and shall be heard



in the prayer of days" (Ecclus. iii. 4). Prayer dissolves conduct into its elements, distinguishing motive from act; it elevates motives whilst apportioning acts according to the rules of prudence. As prayer brings us close to God, so it increases our humility. The saints in the sublimest tranquillity of contemplation yet remembered their evil days; in their days of strength they prayed against the inevitable return of weaker moments. Nor were they despondent when God left them dry and parched. They used to forefend by specially fervent prayer the cunning approaches of the enemy, knowing that "he that plougheth not in the winter shall beg in the summer" (Prov. xx. 4).

No form of prayer is so well calculated to cleanse our souls of every stain as that directed to Jesus Crucified, whether it be oral or mental. By a daily regimen of such prayer, evil tendencies are overwhelmed by graces and affections so attractive as to win us away from our weaknesses.

The use of particular examen is of prime importance. Nor need one be over-anxious about its method. This devout exercise is made efficacious for perfection simply by earnest advertence, even for a very short time daily to a single fault, together with the thought ready at hand of the beauty of the opposite virtue. This generates zeal against a particular defect, a zeal so anxious as to be always on the watch, so stubborn as never to give up the fight. Happy the man to whom such a zeal is granted; particular examen is fed by a particular grace. When one besetting sin is reduced to its lowest degree of harmfulness, then other difficulties one by one assert themselves, and the soul by particular examen assails and subdues them. It is plain that the steady return of the mind to spiritual vigilance of so highly particularized a nature, guarantees a firm resolve to be perfect in all things. The flourishing state of the Lord's vineyard within us is traced to this spirit by the Holy Ghost: "Catch us the little foxes that destroy the vines, for our vineyard hath flourished" (Cant. ii. 15).

If so much be said of the particular examen, what praise



is sufficient for the Sacrament of Penance, joined to or leading on to Holy Communion. St. Francis de Sales, however, cautions us against confessing any venial sin that we are not seriously determined to give up. This is a safeguard against a routine spirit in approaching the sacrament. For the obligation of confession does not include venial sins, though its grace and forgiveness extend over them. The sacrament should be used only in this regard with a distinct view to reform. Thanks be to God, however, the most careless of us feels a special aversion for some petty fault or other, and that feeling, as we have already noticed, is inspired by the Holy Ghost. How easy and good it is then to make a confession fruitful of great results. We have only to emphasize that fault, to dwell upon it, to go into details about it, to dig underneath it, and cut away its foul roots of motive and of occasion. Sacramental confession thus used becomes a divine particular examen.

More than once we have insisted that the Sacrament of Confession requires for its best results humiliation of spirit. In the *Lives of the Fathers of the Desert* it is related that the devil once appeared to St. Macarius and insolently boasted: "I do all that you do. You fast, I never eat. You watch, I never sleep. There is only one thing which you do, that I do not, and cannot do." "What is that?" asked the hermit. "I do not humble myself, and I cannot."

The high prerogative of a Christian is not to leap straight away from venial sinfulness and to run onward to holiness, but rather to hobble along in humility with occasional and brief, aye, very brief, intervals of very swift progress. Confession proves itself best when the penitent creeps away as much humbled as consoled. An extremely bad man came to confession to St. Anthony of Padua, but his shame was so great that he could hardly speak intelligently. "Go home, my son," said the Saint, "and write your sins out." He did so, and filled a large sheet of paper with the record of a depraved life. Returning he handed the paper to St. Anthony, but it had become entirely blank, and

was shining brilliantly. Thus does sorrow of the humiliating kind act upon sin whether great or little.

Many a soul rises from tepidity into what is called the second conversion, which is equivalent to a second vocation, a new call to holiness, and the beginning of a new spiritual era. The earliest entrance into God's service is often defective, subject to blind impulses, spiritual excitement, youthful impressionableness, agitating waves of sensible devotion. There is sometimes lack of the deep-seated reasonable motives, sufficient for permanent devotedness, which really dwells in our underlying life of purpose and of perception. As years pass on the romance of the earlier consecration evaporates, the work-a-day duties crowd in belittling the paramount claims of prayer, and the supreme need of seeking absolute blamelessness of conduct. Recall from this region abounding in venial faults, many and miserable, is frequently a more distinct crisis in the spiritual life than was the first vocation to perfection. Abraham's final vocation was more fateful than the first. The first was but the passing away from his home and kindred; the later and greater was the immolation of his son Isaac, and God said to him: "Now I know that thou fearest God, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for My sake" (Gen. xxii. 12).

Total dedication is shown in the giving up of certain relaxations and companionships, the taming of a savage temper, renouncing the stubborn claim to certain occupations, silencing the fierce assertion of "rights"—all closely interwoven with a veritable network of venial sins. These are suddenly or gradually revealed in their true light—the light of contrast with Jesus Crucified. The holy war is now begun again, with the calm courage of a veteran, the relentless, because deliberate, energy of one entirely familiar with his task, who has been taught the precious lessons of painful experience.

Love is a hardy virtue; instead of shunning painful ordeals it seeks and plans them. It is the foundation of our courage in our struggle with venial sins. The love of Jesus Christ is a never-

failing remedy for despondency in well doing. Constant advertence to eternity is a never-failing source of valor in God's service. We must make up our minds to life-long struggle against these petty defilements known as venial sins. Though God grant us sensitiveness to spiritual cleanliness, refinement of taste in moral matters, a well-developed aversion for spiritual incongruities, we can never be totally free from faults. It is said of the truest servants of God: "A just man shall fall seven times, and shall rise again" (Prov. xxiv. 16). For the perfect and final cure of venial sins you must wait for the caustic salve of purgatory. The spiritual writers of former ages call them "daily sins." They are as sure to afflict us as night to creep upon day—they are inevitable. The only portion of our interior realm that they can be quite excluded from, is the realm of deliberate willfulness. Venial sins are like the parasites on certain animals; they are the vermin of the soul. St. Francis de Sales compares involuntary faults to mistletoe which grows *on* the tree and is rooted *in* the tree, yet is not *like* the tree, least of all *part* of the tree (*Spirit*, p. 159). The Lord uses our weakness to increase our strength, for humiliation, sometimes exceedingly bitter, follows venial sins even when they are not deliberate. And this humility crowds back our own glory to make place for God's. It is not to allow us to ruin ourselves even incipiently, but rather to chasten our pride, that our heavenly Father lets us slip back into these defects. The Christian's ideal humiliation is the minimum of guilt followed by the maximum of shame: "Chastising, the Lord hath chastised me, but He hath not delivered me over to death" (Ps. cxvii. 18).

### XIII.

#### THE PASSION OF CHRIST.

"My soul is sorrowful even unto death" (Mark xiv. 34).

"He fell upon His face, praying and saying: My Father if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me. Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt. xxvi. 39).

"And His sweat became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground" (Luke xxii. 44).

THE sacrifice of His life for us was the end and aim of our Savior's entire existence. He said: "I have a baptism, wherewith I am to be baptized: and how am I straitened until it be accomplished" (Luke xii. 50). It was, also, the whole purpose of His Father, for "God so loved the world as to give His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (John iii. 16). Let us enter into the Garden of Olives with our Redeemer, and study the beginnings of His atoning sacrifice. A disciple of His cannot do otherwise than join Him there to lament his sins, and make penitential self-sacrifice the guiding principle of his life. He bids us behold the agony He endured for our sakes, to take it as a pattern; to note His falling upon the ground in a spasm of interior pain; His beseeching His Father to pity and relieve Him; His humble acceptance of the Father's stern refusal; His sweat of blood. He asks us reproachfully: "Attend and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow" (Lam. i. 12). Oh, Jesus, give me that grace, that instinct of love by means of which grief for my sins shall enter my soul, not by discussion of reasons and causes so much as by the sweet force of love. When I lived

in sin my joy was Thy sorrow, and now my sorrow is Thy joy. As I bend over thee in Thy agony Thy word comes true: "Thy sorrow shall be changed into joy" (John xvi. 20).

One thing I own; it is my only self-created possession—my sinfulness. Jesus is jealous even of that; He disputes it with me, wrests it from me, and makes my sins His; and His Father ratifies the act: "Him Who knew no sin, He hath made sin for us, that we might be made the justice of God in Him" (2 Cor. v. 21). Here in the Garden He assumes the ownership of our wickedness, not indeed of its guilt, of which He is incapable, but of its shame and its punishment. What shall I not give Him in return? Many a one has achieved much merit for Paradise by cherishing a blind yearning for at least a share in the mental agony that Jesus here suffered for his sins. In all love's glorious history, here was its supreme act: Jesus the Son of God, having the joy of His divine union with the Father "set before Him," put it away, and "endured the cross" of our salvation (Heb. xii. 2). Love gives up all for the beloved! When love would be sovereign it seeks the cross, it is enthroned on Calvary. The rendezvous for love's royal progress is with Jesus in the Garden, and all its royal robes of honor are sufferings. Man has two good things at his disposal to give away, but all creatures are unworthy to have them; they ought to be given to God alone, the heart and the will to love and to suffer. For Christ has raised the value of sufferings so much that they are become more precious, not only than earthly goods, but even than the rarest favors of heaven (Father Thomas of Jesus). Certain it is, now, that suffering is inseparable from sanctity.

"Rise up, let us go, behold he that will betray Me is at hand" (Mark xiv. 42).

"And forthwith coming to Jesus, he [Judas] said, Hail, Rabbi. And he kissed Him. . . . Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and held Him" (Matt. xxvi. 49, 50).

"And they led Him away to Annas first" (John xviii. 13).



"One of the servants standing by gave Jesus a blow" (John xviii. 22).

"But they holding Jesus led Him to Caiphas the high priest who said to the scribes and ancients: What think you? But they answering said: He is guilty of death" (Matt. xxvi. 57, 66).

"Then did they spit in His face and buffeted Him, and others struck His face with the palms of their hands, saying: Prophesy unto us O Christ; who is he that struck Thee?" (Matt. xxvi. 67, 68.)

"Then Peter began to curse and swear that he knew not the Man" (Matt. xxvi. 74).

As a bad man hastens to his sin, so Jesus hastens to His death. "Rise, let us go." Judas awaits Him, His enemies await Him. Who would have thought that our Savior would favor the traitor's plan? Why not rise up and flee far away, far out of reach of danger? Or why not go forward to conquer and to scatter His enemies? To conquer is not to redeem, or rather to redeem is the only way to conquer men's hearts. How pitiful if His eager steps towards bonds and death shall leave me lagging behind in cowardice! O Jesus, when Thou keepest Thy appointment with Thy mortal foes, I shall be with Thee. A loving friend of Thine, St. Paul of the Cross, when vested and proceeding to the altar to offer Mass, used to murmur in his soul: "Behold the hour is at hand when the Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Matt. xxvi. 45). If a Saint thus reproached himself, what should be my self-accusation, when my soul rises in the morning and hastens to join Thee in Mass and Holy Communion?

When Jesus was presented to the Living God in the Temple, His Mother offered Him up for sinners with a generosity of which she alone was capable, as she had already given for our salvation the first drops of His Blood shed at His circumcision. Now He looks back to those beginnings. He takes them into His deepest soul, gathers together every pain suffered after-

wards, looks forward to the torments and agonies before Him, and presents Himself in entire immolation to the poisonous kiss of Judas. How shall I meet my little miseries, I who claim to be a chosen one among the Redeemer's associates?

Let us consider Jesus standing a fettered criminal in the court of the high priest; Holiness Itself subjected by His own act to the most malicious of mankind. What were His thoughts? His hard sentence before that tribunal was to secure for us the grace to stand acquitted before the awful tribunal of His Father. By enduring the questioning of those perjured judges, He would win for us the power of answering happily the awful questionings of God on our day of reckoning.

When these high-placed enemies of His had condemned our Savior to death, they turned Him over to the lower order of His enemies, lower in brutishness, but equal in power to torment Him. Behold Jesus among these wretches. Was ever a picture of hell better painted? Could demons torment a victim more cruelly than these human fiends tormented Christ through the remaining hours of the night before Good Friday? spitting in His face, blindfolding Him, buffeting Him, taunting Him with His ruin. To hinder such scenes in hell, Jesus submitted to them in the house of Caiphas. How perfect should be our confidence in His goodness. And O how sincere should be our sympathy with Him!

"And the whole multitude of them rising up led Him to Pilate" (Luke xxiii. 1).

"And Pilate saith to them: I find no cause in Him" (John xviii. 38).

"And he sent Him away to Herod, who.....set Him at nought and mocked Him, and putting a white garment on Him, sent Him back to Pilate" (Luke xxiii. 7-11).

"But the whole multitude together cried out: Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas" (Luke xxiii. 18).

"They cried again saying: Crucify Him, crucify Him" (Luke xxiii. 21).

"Having scourged Jesus he delivered Him unto them to be crucified" (Matt. xxvii. 26).

"Jesus therefore came forth bearing the crown of thorns and the purple garment. And Pilate saith to them: Behold the Man" (John xix. 5).

"O Lord," exclaims Blessed Henry Suso, "Thou alone art the sufferer Who has never deserved to suffer, Thou and Thy sorrowful Mother; and yet Thy sufferings are beyond those of all sinners together." Whether He suffered in the nerves of His body or in the affections of His soul, He suffered in all things humiliation. Whether they lashed His body with whips or His soul with words, they humbled Him and degraded Him. As He is flung into Pilate's court, dragged back and forth between Pilate and Herod, flogged to the bone, spit upon, crowned with thorns, thrust aside that a murderer might escape, His soul appalled by the yells for His life's blood, it is always shame that He suffers, deeper and deeper shame. "I am a worm and no man, the reproach of men and the outcast of the people" (Ps. xxi. 7).

"Behold the Man," cried Pilate, and His words were the doom of Jesus as King, as Messias, and as Teacher of the Jews. For my sake He gave up His good repute. For His sake must I not be ready to give up mine, or at least to give up men's praises and work for God in obscurity and without thanks? The *Ecce Homo* teaches me that what is a disgrace to me as a man is a privilege to me as a Christian. And so it was the Apostles rejoiced "that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus" (Acts v. 41).

When a Christian has well studied the lessons of the Passion, he receives humiliations as a banker receives interest on a loan—he welcomes snubs, he stores up contradictions. These things of hurt are dear to his sense of justice. Holy acquisitiveness for wrongs and degradations is another name for humility. Proud reason protests: Are such injuries in simple reality a man's due? May one in plain good sense frame his mind that way?—

eagerly desiring humiliations and courting their occasions. Such is the protest of the generation of worldlings. But all who hold the diploma of Christ's school of Calvary conform resolutely to His example, "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled Himself becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross" (Phil. ii. 6-8).

Look through it all from first to last: who is the one that said most for Jesus, that said anything for Him? The typical coward of the human race, Pontius Pilate. Jesus is disgraced even in His advocate.

"And [they] led Him away to crucify Him" (Matt. xxvii. 31).

"And bearing His cross He went forth to that place which is called Calvary" (John xix. 17).

"They laid hold of one Simon of Cyrene coming from the country; and they laid the cross on him to carry after Jesus" (Luke xxiii. 26).

"Daughters of Jerusalem weep not over Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Luke xxiii. 28).

"And there were also two other malefactors led with him to be put to death" (Luke xxiii. 32).

Why has the Christian instinct made the Sign of the Cross the beginning and end of every prayer and good work, unless it be that every prayer and good work is a form of self-immolation? How often, alas, do the divinest symbols lose their significance by familiar use.

"My yoke is sweet and My burden is light" (Matt. xi. 30), are the words of Truth itself. Every burden is truly sweet and light and happy if one but suffers it in His company. He said to all: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke ix. 23). How much is meant by this invitation of Christ? It calls to voluntary continuous self-denial for the love of God and the saving of souls.

Among the Cyrenian's privileges was a close view of the whole tragedy of the Crucifixion; for, the journey ended, must he not have tarried on Calvary and received the thanks of Jesus? Could he possibly have resisted the fascination of an event that to this distant day enthralls all men? He saw it all, the stripping, the nailing, the lifting up of Jesus into the air, the three long hours and all that happened in them. Was not all this to him the novitiate of a crucified life? Let it be so to us.

"They crucified Him" (John xix. 18).

The cross is raised, and Jesus appears in the air swaying to and fro as His gibbet is being fixed in its place. The executioners look at Him, studying whether or not the nails and cords will hold Him securely, and they exchange words together in a business-like way. But the conspirators greet Him with a loud and frantic shout of triumph, it is their shout of victory over Him. At the same moment from Mary, and her little group of faithful ones, come sighs and sobs of horror and of pity; they can hardly bear to look upon Him. But how much better do they now love Him in eternity from remembrance of that fearful sight.

"And Jesus said: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke xxiii. 34).

"And Jesus said to him: This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise" (Luke xxiii. 43).

"Woman behold thy son. After this He said to the disciple: Behold thy Mother" (John xix. 26, 27).

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. xxvii. 46.)

"I thirst" (John xix. 28).

"It is consummated" (John xix. 30).

"Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit. And saying this He gave up the Ghost" (Luke xxiii. 46).

"Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John xv. 13).

But, O Lord, Thy love is greater, for Thou didst die for



Thy enemies, enemies shouting out Thy death sentence: "Crucify Him!" enemies insulting Thee in Thy last agony.

It requires no small stock of humility to feel kindly towards one who is our ill-wisher. Yet our Master says: "And if you love them that love you, what thanks are yours? for sinners also love those that love them" (Luke vi. 32).

Christ was treated as a malefactor, and in return He loved His persecutors as if they were the best of all mankind. Why cannot we remember, when we are ill-treated, shoved aside, deprived of our rights, slandered—why cannot we remember how Christ the Infinite God was treated. Many a Christian is in peril of damnation because he gives back hate for hate. Many a devout person is halted on the road to perfection by harboring aversions, indulging antipathies, and greedily joining in gossip. It was a maxim of St. Philip Neri, that the man who cannot endure the loss of honor is incapable of making progress in the spiritual life.

St. Bernard says that if one has not learned to be quick in congratulating others in their good fortune and ready in condoling with them in their grief, he is not fit to be a devout Christian. It was said of St. Teresa that to be entirely sure of getting a favor from her, one must do her an injury. In this she but patterned on Christ Crucified. Tell us what prayer He ever uttered that equalled in force and death-like intensity His first words from the cross offered for His worst enemies, the worst men in the world: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." It behooves us, then, to emulate His charity by praying most especially for the conversion of sinners of the more hopeless sort.

"And be kind one to another, merciful, forgiving one another even as God has forgiven you in Christ" (Eph. iv. 32). How sweet a manner of life is this! How preferable, apart from any law, is this kindly way to the unforgiving way. And the Apostle continues, "Be ye followers of God as most dear children." To follow God is to be merciful, to come down even from heaven

itself to share our neighbor's miseries; to be held guilty for their sins and suffer the penalty for them; to take those who are most alien to us and most offensive, and treat them kindly; to love them and to love them to the end; to love one's bitterest enemies in imitation of God's Son Who died for His murderers, excusing them and praying for their pardon. This is what the imitation of God means, as the Apostle declares, to "Walk in love as Christ also hath loved us and hath delivered Himself for us."

His enemies bantered Jesus to come down from the cross. And we are tempted to wish that He had done so out of love for His Blessed Mother. Ludolph the Saxon tells of a certain novice whose mother came to him, and besought him to leave his monastery for her sake and to return home. He answered, "Christ did not descend from the cross on His Mother's account, so neither will I for thy sake leave the cross of penance."

"With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Gal. ii. 19). If I could say those words in all truth, I should bear the marks of the Crucified and be a saint. I can at least long for this privilege and pray for it; and when Providence offers me little crosses (at best but mimic crucifixions) I can accept them gladly. Surely I ought to know Christ and Him Crucified, as His Church and His Sacraments and His inspirations constantly recall Him to me; and, yes—also, because by mortal sin I have so often crucified the Son of God in my heart (Heb. vi. 6).

St. Bonaventure says that if one does not sensibly feel compassion for our Lord's sufferings, he can at least have the merit of acknowledging that he has an heart of stone. May our Savior accept from us this poverty-stricken gift, too often all we have to give.

A good undertaking is not at its worst, when all that we can do is to suffer and to pray for it. Our Redeemer was never so near victory as when He cried out with a loud voice, saying: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Is your soul doubtful about bringing in a stray sheep of the Good Shepherd? Ask yourself this: Am I willing to suffer and

to die for this conversion? No other inspiration of zeal can compare with that of desiring to suffer for a holy cause.

"For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. i. 21). How glorious a saying: my very existence on earth is one with the wisdom and love of God as imparted by Christ. And the Apostle continues, "to die is gain." When death comes at last, then shall Christ's life be the more abundantly given to me. O Jesus, all my merit is from Thy death; that is the pattern of my living and my dying; from it I learn love's dearest lesson, the spirit of sacrifice. "O Jesus, how lovable is Thy death, since it is the sovereign effect of Thy love."

#### XIV.

### CONFESSION, OR THE GOSPEL DOOR OF MERCY.

"He breathed on them and He said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them" (John xx. 22, 23).

THE all-bountiful God thus poured out upon His Church, and upon us, all of us and each of us, His spirit of forgiveness. This power of pardoning, so essentially His own, the Son of God placed in the hands of His priests, that as His Father sent Him to pardon, so His Holy Spirit should penetrate to the souls of His priests, and enrobe them in the same "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. v. 18), whose benignant sentence He should approve in heaven. It is a peculiar blessing that they who exercise this power are men themselves, subject to sin, and in need of the same deliverance from it, so that they may deal with others the more pitifully.

Jesus, the friend of sinners, made their power so ample that He did not reserve to Himself any, even the deadliest crime, nor set any bounds to the number of sins that shall be forgiven, nor make the frequency of our ungrateful relapses into sin a bar to further forgiveness. His immense love embraces and overlaps any possible wickedness, and with its divinity of compassion cleanses our worst foulness whiter than snow, making good the prophet's word: "You shall be cleansed from all your filthiness. . . . and I will give you a new heart, and create a new spirit within you" (Ezech. xxxvi. 25, 26).

The virtue of faith is, by this sacrament, made more and more surely the root and foundation of all my justice (*Con. Trid.*, sess. vi., cap. viii.). Herein, too, is a comfort raised above

all human comfort; for in the tribunals of earth the avowal of guilt universally brings ignominy upon the criminal, while in this heavenly court it confers upon him perpetual nobility. The love of God also grows rich within us in this sacrament, changing the horrible sorrow of despair into the affectionate sorrow of friendship, so welcome to God, so soothing to the pardoned culprit. In confession the heroic virtue of fortitude strengthens, and the shivering caitiff is changed into the bold champion of Christ, having already won that dearest of all victories, the victory of self.

Besides this, Jesus has in this sacrament respected freedom's fairest prerogatives. For quite willingly must the sinner drag himself before Christ's deputy; and there accuse himself; and there bear witness against himself in truth's holiest shrine; he judges, he condemns himself; and finally he resolutely executes the sentence upon himself.

In no way, furthermore, is humility so well practised. For as our Redeemer, "having joy set before Him, endured the cross" (Heb. xii. 2), which shamed Him with our sins; so now do I with shame and confusion of face, yet courageously, take my place beside Him.

Nor does all this breathing of the Holy Ghost benefit hard sinners alone. It goes on with us after we enter upon a life of perfection, when mortal sin, and therefore its pardon in confession is practically out of the question. More and yet more the sacrament washes us from our former stains of iniquity, and cleanses us brighter and brighter from our sins (Ps. l. 4), quieting misgivings, deepening hope, opening in our spirit's depths richer and richer fountains of gratitude. Renewal of confession is, to devout souls, a perennial return of the tide of the divine ocean of mercy washing away all anxieties about the past, all dread about the future. Let us go, therefore, with joyful confidence to the "throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid" (Heb. iv. 16). Little wonder, then, that this sacrament is religion's plain test of validity. Say



of any man that he is so bad that he cannot go to confession, and you tell of a state of awful confusion of soul.

This sacrament was instituted by our Lord on the night of the Resurrection Day. He called His Father to witness it, and He breathed His Holy Spirit upon us to sanctify it. As between man and God it is a marvelous sign of reconciliation, as between man and man, it is, next to baptism, easily the most beneficial of communications. Other sacraments indeed bind us to men holily, as in marriage by the highest social union, as in Holy Orders by apostolic union. But in confession the bond is of perfect brotherly love; in the exchange of sin for pardon, a holy friendship is cemented. Poor sinner as I am I yet furnish the matter of this sacrament, nay I am myself the matter, my thoughts, words, looks, posture, being gladly received by Jesus Christ as the reason for my pardon. Confession is a divine "chapter of faults," infinitely more wide reaching and deep searching than other such exercises of humility.

On this treacherous earth of ours, confession is the one inviolable shrine of truth telling. The foulest crimes are herein avowed under no compulsion, but that of the gentle stress of conscience; there are many perjured lawsuits, but few false confessions. The confessional is the one place in all this world where hard admonition is eagerly sought and obediently accepted. This sacrament is the universal leveller: the Pope kneels and confesses, and so does the altar boy; the bishop no less than the priest; the guileless maiden and the filthy strumpet; the millionaire and the bootblack: "For there is no distinction. For all have sinned, and do need the glory of God" (Rom. ii. 22, 23), Whose brightness is reflected in sacramental absolution.

The benefit of this sacrament as a means of guidance in spiritual affairs is exceedingly great. The Holy Spirit says: "I wisdom dwell in counsel, and am present in learned thoughts" (Prov. viii. 12). The gift of counsel is imparted in confession as a house is built for a dwelling. In all the greater affairs of life, spiritual guidance is of critical necessity. Who but a fool

decides his vocation all alone. The same may be said of all supernatural matters of more than ordinary moment, especially while one is venturing along the earlier stages of life's journey. Obedience to one's confessor is a test of wisdom, in all eras, and for all circumstances of our religious career. Where piety is reasonable it gladly seeks approval, whether this means spurring onward, or reining back. One of a confessor's graces is the perception of God's pointers in his penitent's thoughts and aspirations. "Breathing upon them, He said: Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John xx. 22). The penitent's own perceptions are too often clouded by self-interest, vainglory, native or visionary tendencies. Furthermore, the evil one tries to mislead us, transforming himself "into an angel of light" (2 Cor. xi. 14). Rely, we beg of you, on your Father confessor's advice; occasionally seek an obedience from him; never, however, asking his help until self-help is exhausted.

No mark of failure is plainer than this: He refuses to take advice. One who is set in his way is faced in the wrong direction. Whosoever is hard to move is hard to save. A stiff-natured man is of small use to his fellows, and is often his own worst enemy. Self-opinionated means wrong-headed. Says the Sage of Holy Writ: "The way of the fool is right in his own eyes, but he that is wise hearkeneth unto counsels" (Prov. xii. 15). A particularly subtle species of this form of pride is changing confessors over and over again, until one is found complaisant enough to be over-persuaded: Complaisant, or indolent, or inexperienced, or sentimental, or visionary confessors are responsible for half the evils of pious people's lives, and for many of the miseries of religious communities. And prudent confessors share the merit of all the holiness of their penitents. One must learn by steady practice freely to open his mind to his spiritual Father. For if a garrulous penitent is a nuisance to his confessor, a reticent one is a menace to himself, especially in the beginning of the spiritual life.

The entire purgative way lies in the treading back and forth

to the confessional. Inasmuch as pride is our main vice, the trunk line in our system of sewerage, the *cloaca maxima* must be humiliation, and confession brings every help to humiliations that our divine Savior could give it. The truest penitent is the one who always manages to be humbled at confession. "Learn of Me," says our Master, "that I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt. xi. 29). Here is His school, and every pupil has here a master trained by the Holy Spirit, a master all to himself. He practices humility of posture, kneeling to a fellowman; of voice and accent, whispering his sins very meekly; of act, by willingness to be cross-questioned, and by acceptance of the penance. But he should look to his heart's motives very closely, for it is "meek and humble of heart" that the Lord would have him to be. He should go beyond the legal duty. Sins of the past long since pardoned, he should tell though under no obligation to do so, if they serve to blind, confound, and stagger him with shame. When telling his petty venial offences, he will do well to describe things minutely, repeat words of which he is heartily ashamed. Anything that disgraces him is a help to this sacrament, if it is truly to be the Sacrament of Penance. Of it the prophet said: "In that day there shall be a fountain open to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for the washing of the sinner" (Zach. xiii. 1). Now the water is the Lord's, but the biting strength of its cleansing is much increased by the admixture of the penitent's shame. Just as our Lord was pleased that on Calvary "they gave Him wine to drink mingled with gall" (Matt. xxvii. 34).

The negative side of sanctification, under God's grace, is our own, and guided by Holy Church it centres in the Sacrament of Penance. All that is meant by "purity of heart" is here effectuated. Our wounds are here treated, first being fully shown, then old bandages removed, and quack ointments washed off, our guilt is manifested naked to the eyes of the Physician of souls. The whole duty of the penitent is sorrow and candor. It seems little enough considering the priceless gift of pardon

to be obtained, yet we meet with many who make this sacrament and communion itself subsidiary to their favorite devotions, subsidiary and secondary. This is like a cook who would spend more time and care on the sauce than on the substance of the food prepared.

Every virtue we possess should be made use of in preparing for confession. Never does an act of faith serve a better purpose than when it recalls our Lord's institution of this sacrament, when it recites again His marvelous words, and gives heart and soul to the firmest conviction that all mortal sins after baptism are remitted by the Sacrament of Penance and by it alone.

Nor can the blessed virtue of hope find wider scope for its comforting influence than before and during confession. My soul proclaims to God and His angels that in the priest's absolution following my sorrow for my sins, and in my truthfulness in manifesting them, rest my sole hope of pardon. In *that* I rest secure. The dark unbroken wall of hell surrounds me but for this sacrament, which a holy writer, Father Hecker, calls the "Gospel Door of Mercy."

But above all other preparatory exercises is that of love, which places me with my beloved Mother Mary at the foot of the cross. Penance is by excellence the sacrament of the cross and the precious Blood of Jesus Christ. May His sorrowful Mother obtain for me a painfully intense grief for having been one of those of whom the weeping Apostle speaks: "They are enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. iii. 18). May the companion of the sorrowful Mother, the great penitent Magdalen, obtain for me that Jesus shall say over me, as He said over her: "Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much" (Luke vii. 47). Then faith, hope, and love must be fused into contrition, each of these virtues deepening, stimulating, or enlightening my sorrow. A fourfold test of my heart's contrition is provided me by the inspired writer: "For I am ready for scourges, and my sorrow is continually before me. For I will



declare my iniquity, and I will think for my sin" (Ps. xxxvii. 18, 19). First, I am ready for scourges, and all penitential exercises within my power shall be my choice. Second, my sorrow is a haunting, abiding sorrow. Third, my confession shall be a full and true declaration to Thy priest of what I am and what I have been in Thy sight. And fourth, I will think of my sins in bitterness of spirit, and with an iron purpose of atonement. Then, and only then, dare I turn to receive Thy joyful welcome.

Whatever garment of joy we wear in this life, we must always pin upon its sleeve some badge of mourning for our sinful doings. True, always, this is especially true on the day of our confession. This is what the blessed man Job means when he says with fierce earnestness: "I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin" (Job xvi. 16). It is one thing to wear sackcloth; quite another thing to pass the needle through it, and stitch by stitch actually to sew it to the skin of our bodies. Such, according to Job, is the difference between contrition fixed and true in its pain, and contrition put on or off for the occasion. "A three-fold cord is not easily broken" (Eccles. iv. 12), says the Sage. Now the triple cord of sacramental sorrow has one strand of sincerity; another of divinity, or of the realization of the sovereign majesty we have outraged; and still another of resolute purpose to do penance.

When this frame of mind is reached, the examination of conscience will take us no long time, for like the sea at the sound of artillery, memory's tomb gives up its dead at the loud call of truth and justice. If I have hope of perfection I should single out and tell the faults that most hinder love; that have most hurt charity to my brethren either directly or by bad example; that are my besetting weaknesses; those that have longest resisted my particular examens.\*

The uses of confession against temptations are very great

\*For a perfect statement of method and motives in the confessions of those desiring to lead a devout life, we recommend the luminous chapter "On Holy Confession," in St. Francis de Sales' *Introduction to a Devout Life*.



indeed, for though the sacrament has for its primary object the forgiving of sins, its overflowing measure is the preventing of sins for the future. St. Francis de Sales says: "The sovereign remedy against all temptations, great or small, is to lay open your heart, and communicate its suggestions, feelings and affections to your director, for you must observe that the first condition that the enemy of salvation makes with a soul which he desires to seduce is to keep silence" (*Introduction to a Devout Life*, iv., 8).\*

Scruples, as is well known, are cured by the sacramental obedience of confession—and in no other way, taking cases generally. The first step towards this blessed deliverance is to postpone all debate about them till confession, and the second is (alas too often exceedingly difficult) to obey one's confessor about receiving communion with the unreasoning submissiveness of a sick child. The worst of this plague of timid souls is the constant tendency to discuss and decide doubts of conscience for oneself, and outside the tribunal of penance. This, to use a homely comparison, is like scratching a mosquito bite, it always increases the pain, and sometimes produces an ulcer. If one will but suffer the sting for half an hour, the little atom of poison is then dissolved. So if one will but suffer the strain of a doubt courageously, and wholly without interior question or answer, the trouble-mindedness will presently disappear. At any rate brave the torture for penance's sake until confession day comes round, thus practising a very high order of obedience to one's confessor.

A certain friend of St. Francis de Sales was full of scruples, mistrusting whether God loved him or not. The Saint wrote to him: "Do not try to discover whether or not your heart is pleasing to God. I forbid you to do it. But you must certainly

\*This applies with supreme emphasis to temptations against chastity, and also to those against faith; these can succeed only by using subterranean methods. Satan is the leader of those works in the dark, of whom our Savior speaks: "Everyone that doth evil hateth the light and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reproved" (John iii. 20).

try to make sure that His Heart is pleasing to you. Now if you but meditate on His Heart, it cannot possibly be otherwise than pleasing to you, so sweet is it; so gentle, so condescending, so loving towards all of His poor creatures, who do but acknowledge their wretchedness; so gracious to the unhappy, so good to the penitent" (*Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, p. 21).

Introspection is the bane of nervous Christians, who search the Jerusalem of their souls with the lamp of self-suspicion. A scrupulous person is one addicted to unreasonable self-accusation. Whosoever is reasonably eager to find the love of Christ in his soul, is a safe and sane Christian. And love is the easiest thing in the world to find, the plainest of mental states. Cannot I tell whether or not I am fond of anybody?—especially of so great a benefactor as my Redeemer? Do I not know which side I train with in the battle of life—Satan's or Christ's? Cannot I tell whether or not I am glad that Jesus Christ is God? That He has a divine purpose of pardoning me, and all who wish to be pardoned? These interior sentiments form singly and together what is called the "love of complaisance" or of good pleasure. They are inspirations of grace. As to possessing the "love of benevolence"—another theological term, meaning well-wishing—cannot I know whether or not I am glad God has so many loving friends in heaven and on earth? Is it not easy to discover whether or not I wish to increase the number? If you say that hard sinners may claim all this, I answer no, unless they lie about it. Furthermore the love of Christ which makes the thought of Him pleasant to us, and that which makes zeal for His glory an interior exhilaration, has an outward accompaniment which is as plain as the inward condition. Our Savior Himself tells us of it: "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me" (John xiv. 21).

For thanksgiving after confession, let us remember how well pleased our Redeemer was with the leprous Samaritan who, finding himself cured while on the way to show himself to the priest, immediately ran back and with a loud voice thanked his

Benefactor (Luke xvii. 15, 16). There were nine other beneficiaries who gave no thanks. We believe that the same proportion still exists, between the thankful and the unthankful penitents cured of the leprosy of mortal sin, or of the itch of venial sin in the Sacrament of Confession. Let us bear in mind that absolution means pardon of sins and eternal salvation, perfect renewal of divine friendship, perpetual and efficacious grace for amendment; strength against temptations; and the injection into our spirit of the new and clean blood of hope for final perseverance. None of us should be done with this sacrament until he has spent some good long minutes in reading or reciting prayers of gratitude to the Good Shepherd, such as the words of the penitent king of Israel: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me, bless His holy name. . . . Who forgiveth all thy iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; Who crowneth thee with mercy and compassion. . . . As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our iniquities from us" (Ps. cii. 1-12). Love alone can enable us to comprehend the greatness of the favor done us in the Sacrament of Penance, and inspire us with adequate thank offerings.

## XV.

### THE MERCY OF GOD.

Let nothing disturb thee,  
Nothing affright thee;  
All things are passing;  
God never changeth;  
Patient endurance  
Attaineth to all things;  
Who God possesseth  
In nothing is wanting;  
Alone God sufficeth.

How tranquil an air breathes into our souls from these maxims of St. Teresa, found after her death in her own handwriting, placed as a marker in her breviary. They are the buoyant, courageous utterance of a spirit to whom the words "nothing" and "everything" meant respectively creatures and God.

Hope is a divine virtue, one of "these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Cor. xiii. 13). Love is thus supreme. As warmth is the essential quality of fire, so faith is love's fire-light, and hope is the fuel for love's flame.

The old-time Catholic poet, Richard Crashaw, calls hope "Queen regent in young love's minority." We may add that when love is full grown and becomes queen regnant, hope is major domo in her royal palace. Yet many a Christian prefers humility to hope, a moral virtue to a divine one, favoring pious timidity at the expense of trustfulness towards God. A devout scare has its uses, but these must fall short of religious panic. Beware of so much as piously mouthing such expressions as, "O I fear I shall never be saved." What is the one dread mystery of religion? Predestination—let us tremblingly own it. But how does God command us to solve it? By trusting Him, trusting Him blindly, trusting Him against appearances. Much

of our spirituality must consist in changing the virtue of love into that of hope.

It is a comfort to feel that I owe my salvation to Christ alone, and that by an act of mercy entirely absolute, His pardon is pure clemency. Any other spiritual comfort is like a blossom in a vase, sure to wither and die, and its seed to die with it. Trust that is rooted in God is a blossom on the living tree of hope, that only changes its bright leaves for the ripened seed of eternal life. It was so on the tree of the cross, when Jesus Crucified dignified this virtue of hope by His farewell utterance: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Luke xxiii. 46). This was His answer to the still lingering terrors of the Garden and the still echoing taunts of its demons there, as well as the mocking voices of the rabble upon Calvary.

Do my past sins cast me down? Yet nothing can give me greater confidence of dying happily (O, what a joy!) than the recollection of all that God has patiently borne from me. His purpose has always been and is now a happy death for me. The maxim, "look to the end," may be unheeded by me, never by Him; God, Who is the beginning, always looks to the end. He will make a complete work of mercy in my case. Can I doubt that this frame of mind is pleasing to Him?

Who is that God Who withers up my soul with fright?—where is He, what is He doing? Taking God as universally present, He is the Spirit in every man's soul pleading for him "with unspeakable groanings" (Rom. viii. 26). He is God the Son on every altar in Christendom, bestowing even Himself without reserve indiscriminately upon the least and the most worthy. He is the infinitely pitiful Father, breathing out His pardoning love in the tribunal of mercy, the confessional. Where is the God Who threatens? He is at distant Sinai. And where is the God Who affectionately invites? He is everywhere; and He is our God.

Theologians teach the difference between the certainty of faith and that of hope. The certainty of faith is seated mainly



in the intelligence, being a divine light by which one is able to exclude doubt or question concerning the truths of religion; and the inspiring motive is God's truthfulness in revealing Christ's doctrine. But the solidity of hope is fixed mainly in the will, a grace by which one excludes fear of damnation, a trustfulness whose motive is God's purpose and promise and power to save us. As faith's certainty is called infallible, *infallibilitas*, so hope's firmness is said to be incapable of disappointment, *infrustrabilitas*. Neither is above the reach of temptation; but it is always in our power to hold fast to our serenity of divine light by the grace of faith, and sweetness of trust in God by the grace of hope. "For when He granteth peace, who is there that can condemn?" (Job xxxiv. 29.) God has set a limit to justice and condemnation, none to mercy. I am forgiven my sins by God, and He is the court of last resort. From that decree there is no appeal against me, none possible or conceivable. There never shall be a new trial of my dreadful case, never for all eternity. I am forgiven now and forever more. "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?"—thus for my faith; "The Lord is the protector of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps. xxvi. 1)—thus for my hope.

God forgives our sins and forgets them. But this is not all: He forgets His past favors to us. He begins over again as if He had heretofore done nothing. In our espousals with His Spirit the honeymoon is perpetual. Every day of His friendship is like the first. God is willing to forego a thousand threatenings of justice, but He has never been known to break a single promise of love. "The Lord is faithful in all His words, and holy in all His works. The Lord lifteth up all that fall, and setteth up all that are cast down. The eyes of all hope in Thee, O Lord" (Ps. cxliv. 13-15).

God has outlined this divine virtue in granting us a naturally hopeful temperament. Among the kinds of men we know, none is more lovely than he who has a particularly hopeful character. He looks on the bright side—what side but that is God's side.

As we hear that the darkest cloud has its silver lining, so must we say that God always sees that side, for He is enthroned beyond the clouds. "Heaven's door is iron on our side and golden on God's side," says Wiseman by one of his characters in *Fabiola*.

In religious activities the busy, pushing man is the hopeful man; and he is the thriving man. He alone has daring plans for God's cause. Difficulties do not daunt him, because his temperament and his grace make sacrifices easy. A supine soul has no place in a saint's following. Cowardice never takes counsel of an energetic friend—it seeks out a minimizing confidant for its perplexities and a temporizing negotiator for its scruples. Instead of abounding in plans it overflows with excuses. Reasons for not acting are abundant in proportion to the vacancy of hopefulness. A safe man, such a one is sometimes called—safe he is because he keeps at a safe distance from the firing line. He can boast that he has never been knocked down, for he is always lying flat on the ground.

One says of an evil that called for remedying, "I was afraid to make matters worse, and so I quietly withdrew." Another kind of a man says, "I had little hope, to be sure, but I could not help doing something—and I did my best." God does not always give a victory to such a one, but he always comforts his conscience with inner approval.

"Among all the virtues, hope is distinguished for activity and energy," says Father Chaignon. Indolence murmurs: "What's the use, success is impossible," with a secret dread of labor and sacrifices and conflicts. Hope says: "Let us fight 'with cheerfulness the battle of Israel'" (1 Mac. iii. 2). The spirit of a valiant disciple is content with a postponed success: "And in doing good let us not fail, for in due time we shall reap, not failing" (Gal. vi. 9)—in due time; later on; in the person of our successors, who shall reap where we have sown; in God's chosen time. Is there any better time? His be the choice of time, as His has been the choice of me to do the work, and the

choice of the work, itself. It is related of Blessed Joan of Arc, that when the English armies had overrun nearly all France, and her king, nobles and people were in dark despair, they enlarged to her upon the great power of the enemy and his vast numbers. But she calmly replied: "If there were a hundred thousand more Goddams (as the English were called by the French) among us, they should not have this country."

For hopefulness is a workaday virtue. A Christian should undertake his Master's work in a bold, confident spirit, and persist in it resolutely. When St. Paul of the Cross had received repeated inspirations from God to establish the Order of Passionists, he opened his whole mind to his bishop and obtained his approval. Then with his encouragement he journeyed on foot to Rome to beg the Pope's blessing on his undertaking. But the chamberlain in attendance turned him away. He looked scornfully at the meek figure, clad in a curious and very poor habit, without a single friend to introduce him, muttering something about founding a new religious order. As he turned him off he cried out after him: "How many tramps do you suppose want to see the Pope every day?" Paul went his way, but he came again. He never faltered, no, not for a moment, during long years filled with various such misadventures. His final success was due as much to his steadfast trust as to his divine inspirations.

Contradictions to imprudent undertakings, or untimely ones, above all to those which lack true Catholic flavor, are a natural sign of God's disapproval. But it is a curious thing, yet spiritual writers agree upon it, that to a work of God all timely and beneficent, contradictions are a mark of divine favor—more, they are a pledge of final success. "Believest thou this?" Therefore, "Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation" (Ecclus. ii. 1).

How shall we destroy the religion of Christ? asked its enemies, after they had put St. Stephen to death. Scatter His

Apostles, so that they may wander in exile, hindered from working in unison, their organization destroyed. How shall we build up the religion of Christ? it was asked in the counsels of heaven. Scatter His Apostles, develop their organization by distributing its leaders, show its universality. One or two are enough for the Jewish nation, let the others preach the Gospel to every creature, offer His all-clean oblation in every country, everywhere from the rising to the setting sun; for lo, Christ is with them in all lands and to all ages. How singular the identity of means and diversity of aim among the enemies and friends of God's Church. How futile to consider means and ends according to man's view, when there is question of a work of God.

Did you ever hear of a really important work of God which did not cost many tears, great trials, and long protracted waiting? "Great designs are not accomplished save by means of patience and the lapse of time. Things which grow in one day, decay in another" (*Letters of St. Francis de Sales to Persons in Religion*, Mackey Edition, VI.). This rule of Providence, so invariable and so trying, is established to purify motives, to demonstrate that God is the author of the work, to secure a better time, place, and other advantages later on, and to enhance the merit of the servants of God who undertake His cause. Failure on the part of an unhopeful temperament produces gloomy disappointment and sourness of manner; but a hopeful temperament is stung by defeat to undertake an immediate counterstroke with renewed courage and dearly-bought increase of prudence.

It has been well said that a true Christian should have but one fear—lest he should not hope enough. The vice which more directly antagonizes hope is despair, but presumption uses and abuses it. The virtue that is made to hurt hope is the prudence degenerated into cowardice which conscripts humility into its craven service. Discouragement apes humility; and timidity, like a man without appetite who boasts of his Lenten fast, poses as discretion.

If timid men would but refuse promotion and reject praise



in religious organizations, they would at least have the merit of consistency. But how many skulkers have claimed and got advancement because they "never got into trouble"—"ten years' service without a complaint against me." Yes, but what good have you done? How different the meekness of an aggressive nature! Who was the invincible leader of God's broken-spirited people? "Moses was a man exceeding meek, above all men that dwelt upon earth" (Num. xii. 3).

A grievous affliction is sadness, and yet it may merit hearty condemnation in a servant of God. The Fathers of the Desert named sadness as the eighth capital sin, for it ranks high as a muddler of clear counsel in divine affairs, and a crippler of strenuous endeavor. In moments of depression abandon yourself absolutely to the will of God, and with every trust in His loving care, "drink the chalice of the Lord with your eyes shut," to use an expression of St. Paul of the Cross, paraphrasing the stalwart utterance of the Psalmist: "I will take the chalice of salvation, and I will call upon the Name of the Lord" (Ps. cxv. 13). It may be the nectar of victory that I shall quaff, it may be the wormwood of defeat—it is always the chalice of the Lord's salvation if I am doing His work.

It was said of the Dominican artist, Fra Angelico, that "he put a bit of paradise into everything he painted." He dealt with dead things and gave them undying life. I am called to divine works, I study and labor and practice holy sympathy for my neighbor; prayer and sacraments I offer to God, things already alive with heaven's blissfulness. Shall I not permit them to pour the paradise of God into my soul? Shall I block the way of heavenly hope with the effigy of prudence and the old clothes of humility? Of St. Catherine of Siena her biographer says, that even as a little child, "as soon as anyone conversed with her, sadness was dispelled from his heart."

An atrocious sinner repents and is forgiven—and then relapses; and this act of feebleness and wickedness is repeated many times over. But what then? Perhaps he at last repents



finally and forever. If so, it is because he did not lose hope, the last anchor of the storm-beaten soul. Consider this: God is pleased and men are edified, when an abominable recedive does not abandon hope in his worst state. What then should be the hope of a man who, though hard pressed by temptation, is yet never mortally overcome in a conflict of many glorious years' duration.

If one feels drawn by the Holy Spirit to make an advance on his present spiritual state—all in the ordinary line of his calling—and yet is too feeble to obey this inward impulse, let him not be so much discouraged as humiliated. Self-contempt is a valuable spiritual asset. And then let him say: I will go forward sooner or later—shame on me for not doing it now. No bankruptcy is so lamentable as loss of heart. God may leave us helpless to act. He never leaves us empty of good-will to resolve to act in the future. What confounds my pride should establish my humility. We believe that no sound is more unwelcome to the demon than the *alleluia* of hope, sung by a soul struggling valiantly with the ignoble fault of procrastination.

"The freshness of a living hope in God," says St. John of the Cross, "inspires the soul with such energy and resolution, with such aspiration after the things of eternal life, that all this world seems to it—as indeed it is—in comparison with what it hopes for, dry, withered, dead, and worthless" (*Obscure Night*, Book II., ch. xxi.). Such a soul cannot be absorbed in worldly things, its sole anxiety is about God. "My eyes are ever towards God" (Ps. xxiv. 15). Our Savior's bitter reproach to Peter was merited by his relying on human means to place his Master on His throne of salvation: "Jesus said to Peter: Get thee behind Me, Satan, thou art a scandal unto Me, because thou savorest not of the things that are of God, but of the things that are of men" (Matt. xvi. 23). Now the foremost of the men on whom Peter foolishly relied was his own raw, headlong, blundering self. Is it otherwise with any of us, who dreams of spiritual gains being anything else than divine favors?

Men read volumes and volumes of travels in strange countries where they never expect to go. Why have they so little interest in the realm of eternal joy, the kingdom of Christ beyond the skies, whither they one and all trust to go and to live forever? It is because they do not cultivate the virtue of hope, that "hope that was laid up for them in heaven" (Col. i. 5), and which projects the joys of present love into the endless years of future love. O God of eternal youth, Thou givest to Thy children a share in Thy own attributes of perpetual peace: "I have said: ye are gods, and sons of the Most High" (Ps. lxxxi. 6). Mayst Thou grant me, with the jubilant energy of youth, to grapple with the tasks Thy providence lays upon me. "For which cause we faint not; for though our outward man is corrupted, the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. iv. 16)—renewed by hope.

Indeed the true Christian never grows old. No matter how sadly decayed his bodily force, his spiritual part is endowed with a divine youthfulness, courage to begin any good work, fortitude to recover quickly from any failure—the glorious hopefulness of his Master in his soul and in his conduct, expressed by the Psalmist in that renowned war cry of holy progress: "I have said, now have I begun: this is the change of the right hand of the Most High" (Ps. lxxvi. 11).

A dreamer and a visionary is nicknamed a "rainbow chaser." But in a real sense every Christian must be that, or the clouds of despondency will darken his whole life. I must look upwards with the divine instinct of holy hope, searching the misty future for God's sign manual on the sky, His covenant that He "will no more destroy every living creature." "I will set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a covenant between Me and between the earth. And when I shall cover the sky with clouds, My bow shall appear in the clouds, and I will remember My covenant with you" (Gen. ix. 13-15).

## XVI.

### A MEDITATION ON THE BLESSED EUCHARIST.

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John vi. 41).

"He filled them with the bread of heaven" (Ps. civ. 40).

WHEN Jesus forecast His ascension into heaven, He asked Himself what relations He should then establish with the world in which He had lived. His answer is the Eucharist, the Real Presence, the Mass, and Holy Communion. This relation is His perpetual presence with us, and it is well nigh a universal presence, it is sacrificial, it is communicative of the Humanity and Divinity of Jesus Christ.

Now, how, as an actual fact, am I related to it? Protestants say that His presence is figurative—a downright heresy. But, alas, do I not make it figurative to myself? I fear that that is a downright fact. Is His presence a Real Presence to me, the actual, literal Christ? In my moments of extraordinary fervor, yes. At other times it is a presence symbolical of God's goodness to me, rather than generative of God's holiness within me. What an invention of love is the Eucharist, love served by power, both all divine. A literal, a universal presence, so as to leave out no little hamlet in the country, no darksome alley in the town; made personal to anyone of us, and at any time we like, by Holy Communion. And, O my God, what is my return? Simply no return beyond law keeping.

To know the Incarnation, really to understand it, would be the beatific vision, the mind absorbed in the most intimate relation of man with God: "Now this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent" (John xvii. 3). The Eucharist is the supreme dogma

for that reason. It is the Incarnation brought home to both Church and Christian, and that most intimately: "As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me" (John vi. 58). Here God is granted to everyone of us by infinite power, guided with infinite wisdom, for purposes of infinite love. If religion is God and man related in love, O what a complete religion is the Eucharist, what a relation of love!

The Real Presence is the reality of all divine union. St. Alphonsus says: "What can God refuse me, when He makes Himself mine, heart to heart?" Who can be faint-hearted in the work of salvation, when his heart is made one with the mighty Heart of Jesus Christ. St. John in writing to a beloved friend, postpones his dearer confidences till he can "speak face to face" (2 John i. 12). One glance of love, one little word of friendship, is worth a thousand pen and ink utterances. What then of being heart to heart with the Son of God—love and love placed in a miraculously close exchange of greetings and of vows? Just as we often say that our feelings are too deep for utterance, and our thoughts beyond the power of words to express, so may we also affirm that we may win Christ's love adequately only by the naked manifestation of our soul's loyalty, and best enjoy it by the mystical revelations of His Heart's deepest affections in Holy Communion. In Holy Communion our Lord, too, invites us to banquet in His company, calling us with a silent loving voice, thrilling us with His own affectionateness. What can be more glorious than this perfect accessibility of Jesus? O Jesus, Thou almighty Son of the living God, what couldst Thou do more for us? What couldst Thou do more?

To borrow a thought of St. Clement of Alexandria. If you study under a physician, you become a physician; working under a carpenter, you become a carpenter, and so of holding company with a merchant or a philosopher. Each master will teach you to be what he is himself. Now, concludes the Saint, God came among men, in order that men might become like God, by

living and working with God-made man, as an apprentice roughly begging a trade, as a student acquiring rules and principles, as a full associate and partner finally sharing the whole vocation of his master. This is the meaning of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, and it is fully borne out by our Lord Himself, in telling of communion: "He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me" (John vi. 57, 58). By frequent communion our Lord imparts to us His own divine life, the motives of God, the divine activity of His love, the sweetness of a divine union like that of His own with His Father. These sentiments are sung beautifully by Holy Church, in one of her hymns for Corpus Christi:

"Se nascens dedit socium,  
Convalescens in edulium,  
Se moriens in pretium,  
Se regnans dat in praemium."\*

God is given to us as fellowman by the Incarnation. He is paid down as our ransom in His atonement. He is placed on the divine throne for us as our reward in heaven. And God is made ours—flesh, blood, soul, and divinity—by His Real Presence in the Eucharist. All this is realized by the personal possession of Christ in Holy Communion.

"Rejoice and praise, O thou habitation of Sion: for great is He that is in the midst of thee, the Holy One of Israel" (Is. xii. 6). All heaven was made for Christ, and He prefers the poor habitation of my soul, nay, even of my body; "standing at the right hand of God" (Acts vii. 55), and at the same time sitting down to banquet with *me*; true God of true God, and yet my guest and my brother. Andrew and another disciple

\*\*"In birth man's fellowman was He,  
His meat while sitting at the board,  
He died his ransom to be,  
He reigns to be his great reward."



following after Jesus near the banks of the Jordan, He turned and looked at them, and then He said: "What seek you?" They said to him: "Master where dwellest Thou? He saith to them: Come and see.....and they abode with Him that day" (John i. 38, 39). "O how happy a day did they pass. Who can tell us what things they then learned from the mouth of their Savior," comments St. Augustine, and he adds: "Let us build a dwelling for Him in our hearts, to which He may come and converse with us." When *we* in turn ask Him, "Master, where dwellest Thou?" He answers: "Upon thy altar; and at Holy Communion in thy heart."

No wonder that the present Supreme Pontiff, Pius X., urges all Catholics to go frequently to Holy Communion, to go every day if they can only keep free from mortal sin; to bring their littlest children to communion as soon as they can be made to understand that it is God Who is going to be given to them, and bids us make our whole lives worthy of such a privilege by the practice of all Christian virtues. Yet many Catholics hold back—some through timidity; multitudes through base sinfulness. Our Pope cries out to us with St. John the Baptist: "There hath stood One in the midst of you Whom you know not" (John i. 26).

"The Master saith: Where is My refectory where I may eat the pasch with My disciples? And he will show you a large dining room furnished" (Mark xiv. 14, 15).

What is the right prayer of preparation for communion? It is the oblation of ourselves to God in Holy Mass, praying for the privilege of dying with Christ. Whatever a Christian offers his Master, short of death, must be offered in token that he is ready to give up all, immediately, and even unto death, for his own sins and those of all mankind. St. John, the Eucharistic Apostle, addresses us especially when he says: "In this we have known the charity of God, because He hath laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John iii. 16). Whatever private intention we

may have in our communion, Jesus is entitled to the fundamental one, expressed in His own words: "This is My body which is given" (Luke xxii. 19); "This is My blood of the New Testament which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins" (Matt. xxvi. 28). The Mass and communion are only mine to offer up because they are Christ's, and to Him they are ever the renewal of Calvary, the assemblage of all of His sacrifices. St. Peter's admonition, too, must not be forgotten: "Christ therefore having suffered in the flesh, be you also armed with the same thought" (1 Peter iv. 1)—the full oblation of all my joys and my sorrows, even of my life for sinners. If I have few, or no bodily sufferings to give, I can certainly offer to God a desire to suffer, and the sweet savor of a penitential spirit: "A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit; a contrite and humbled heart, O Lord, Thou wilt not despise" (Ps. l. 19).

I offer myself to Thee, O Jesus, on the altar. Thou in turn dost offer me with Thyself to Thy Father. Thy offering of Thee and me is as one offering, so close are we united by Thy love for me and my love for Thee. O Jesus, I offer Thee all the men, women, and children whose salvation depends on me (awful thought), that since Thou and I are made one by this holy sacrament, so my service of these souls may be Thine own, both for time and for eternity.

The Eucharist is a memorial to us of the Crucifixion of Jesus: "For as often as you shall eat this bread, and drink this chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord until He come" (1 Cor. xi. 26)—a remembrance to us indeed, but also to Him, and how deeply it must move Him. Can there be any doubt but that He would have us remember His death at our communion with tenderness something like His own? The remembrance of Christ's sufferings, exceeding as they do all ever known to mankind, is the sweetness of our every joy—Christ's the suffering, ours the joy.

"Can it be, O Jesus, King as Thou art, that Thou dost come here and place Thyself in my hands, and in my heart, and seem to

say: I died once for thy sake, and I come to thee now to show thee that I do not regret doing so, but that, on the contrary, if there were need I would give My life for thee a second time" (*Letters of Blessed John of Avila*). Lord, eternity is indeed long, and its joys are indeed great. Give me its happiness, I beseech Thee—a gift worthy of Thy riches and of Thy bounty. And yet, O Lord, a gift of an eternity of bliss, without close union with Thee, is not equal to that of Holy Communion. For herein Thou grantest me Thy own Self, the fountain source of heaven's ceaseless ages of joy and of peace. This gift of gifts, and giver of gifts, Thou bestowest on me every day, nay Thou forcest it upon me with Thy persistent love. Well has Thy prophet said of Thee: "He filled them with the bread of heaven" (Ps. civ. 40).

Saying such things to Jesus on the altar is only talk, but it is affectionate talk, and exceedingly delightful. It is all I can do—poor me! I must not despair because I have but "two brass mites" to cast into His treasury, for this is all I have (Luke xxi. 3, 4), namely, to tell Him that I love Him. Those words have a divine fire that burns up concupiscence within me, and hinders me from loving what Jesus hates.

Yet it is true that Jesus asks of us more than we have got to give. Ruysbroeck says: "He consumes us without being satisfied; His hunger is insatiable." What then? Shall He remain unsated? No, He gives us the superfluity of His own power of loving, making us so far "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter i. 4), "and consuming our life," continues Ruysbroeck, "in order to change it into His own."

"Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath done great things; show this forth in all the earth" (Is. xii. 5).

Thanksgiving is the overflow of the understanding and the will upon the memory, which thereby recalls the favors of the past. Now Jesus says of the Eucharist: "Celebrate it in remembrance of Me" (Luke xxii. 19). The offering of the Eucharist itself is then my thanksgiving after communion. I

offer the gifts of all the ages as my thanksgiving to the living God for my communion, since I offer Jesus the Son of the living God, Who said: "When I shall be lifted up above the earth, I will draw all things unto Me" (John xii. 32). Every virtue of the Heart of Jesus is thereby embraced in my *Deo Gratias*. The lessons of the Eucharist are all summarized in that of gratitude. And O how deep it should be. O heavenly Father, whatever token Thou givest me of Thy love, the one greatest token is the gift of Thy Son. Him do I now possess, Him do I now give unto Thee, as my thank offering.

St. Ignatius was once making a voyage by sea from Spain to Italy. A dreadful storm struck the ship, and the passengers and the crew were in a panic. The Saint alone was calm, but owned that he was sad, saying afterwards: "I was not afraid on account of my sins, nor of possible damnation, but I was overcome by shame and sorrow for not having been grateful enough for God's favors, and employed them well enough in His service" (*St. Ignatius' Testament*). Regret for forgetfulness of favors is in itself a good thank offering. What can I say, Lord, but this "I love Thee." What can I promise but this: "I will always love Thee." And I will love as Thou lovest, both God and man. For Thy sake I will love good and bad men, indiscriminately and everywhere; I will do favors, and forgive injuries for no other reason than for Thyself. This shall be my life's thanksgiving.

"The voice of the Beloved, behold He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills. . . . Arise, make haste, My love, My dove, My beautiful one, and come" (Cant. ii. 8-10).

Lord, Thou comest suddenly, and Thou breakest in upon me with terrible eagerness. Jesus answers: "Yes, My son, I am eagerly searching for thee, for thou art My debtor, and thou must pay what is Mine—thou owest Me an infinite debt, for in Holy Communion I have given thee My very Self. Thy debt is so far above thy power to pay, that I must reduce thee to bondage, as My only compensation, seizing on all thy goods;



and especially must I appropriate to Myself thy very soul, with all its thoughts and affections." Lord, I thankfully become Thy bondsman. Teach me to realize at how great a price Thou hast purchased me. Instruct me, I implore Thee, in my duty to Thee, my divine Master. Jesus answers: "Thy duty is sincerest thanksgiving and imitation of Me in the Eucharist. For if there I allow thee to do with Me whatsoever thou pleasest, why shouldst thou not allow My Holy Spirit to do with thee whatsoever He pleases? Thus shalt thou best pay thy debt and give thanks."

Sometimes a soul repines against God, because He might force him to be perfect and does not. What! would you have Him treat you as the artist does the stone, with chisel and mallet? Would you rather have the perfection of the marble statue, than the glory of a child of God? Yet force us He does, in a way, just as He forces us to love our father and mother, by the compulsion of gratitude, so that we shall say: I cannot help loving God because He has loved me so long and so tenderly; gratitude compels me; I am under the constraint of His loveworthiness, as my heavenly Father, and my Savior, as the bestower of every gift of fatherhood and of salvation in Holy Communion. To me, then, be applied, in all its terrific force, the threat of the Apostle: "If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema, maranatha" (1 Cor. xvi. 22).

What is done for a multitude of men is too often done for a multitude of ingrates. The spread of the boon among many causes vagueness of appreciation in each; yet St. Thomas teaches that one of the perfections of a divine giver is that His gift to all is general and complete to each in particular. Grant me, O bountiful Jesus, the gratitude of Thy Apostle who says: "He loved me, and He delivered Himself up for me" (Gal. ii. 20). For me, O Lord, didst Thou come down from heaven and take flesh and blood; for me didst Thou brave the assaults of demons, and bear the sorrows of hell; for me wast Thou be-



trayed and cursed and shamed and crucified—all for me, as if I alone of all men was to be saved.

This thought makes my thanksgiving personal. As salvation is my personal possession, so must my personal love be given in return. Personal sanctification is Christ's will with me, and mine with Him must be direct and individual thank offering. The peculiar office of Mass and communion is to bring home to Catholics, taken separately, the fruits of the Crucifixion, as if each had been present personally on Calvary. What can be more glorious? The little child can love Jesus in childlike exclusiveness of possession, the dull toiler can expend on Him his stupid but perfect love as upon a divine guest Whom he monopolizes, just as well as any doctor of divinity, as any famous preacher in their more cultured worship. He admits *me* to a private audience, nay to closest union of love, though I have been a loathsome sinner; He commits Himself to me to safeguard His honor, though I have betrayed Him repeatedly; He sets me forth among my fellows as His advocate, though I have often taken sides with the devil against Him. The least I can do is to pour forth to Him my heart's most fervent thanks.

## XVII.

### MAKING A VIRTUE OF NECESSITY.\*

To be forced to depend entirely upon God is a better condition than to be dependent in part on Him and in part on one's own efforts also. "I have always been fond of making a virtue of necessity," says St. Teresa (*Letter lxxiv.*). It sounds paradoxical, but it is quite right to say, that the better service of God is by virtue that is compulsory.

The words of Jesus in the Garden: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt. xxvi. 39), achieved our salvation, the compulsory act of a Savior Who yet "was offered because He willed it" (Is. liii. 7). It is better to let God gain you to His side than to strive to gain God to your side. One of the accusations of the Royal Prophet against the Israelites is that they "Waited not for God's counsel" (Ps. cv. 13). The spontaneous activity of guileless souls responsive to the attractions of grace, is the highest order of spirituality. As Moses was bidding farewell to Israel, he commanded them: "And thou shalt build an altar to the Lord thy God, of stones which iron hath not touched, and of stones not fashioned nor polished; and thou shalt offer upon it holocausts to the Lord thy God" (Deut. xxvii. 5, 6). Why this rude architecture for the divinest uses? Because, as we

\*For a powerful exposition of the spiritual doctrine here treated, the reader is respectfully referred to the small posthumous work of Father J. P. de Caussade, S.J., entitled *Abandonment, or Absolute Surrender to Divine Providence*, edited by the late Rev. Henri Ramière, S.J., translated by Ella McMahon (New York: Benziger Brothers). The English version, which is accurate and exceedingly appreciative, was due to Father Hecker's encouragement, who had used the original continuously from its first appearance.

must suppose, the Lord would welcome the homage of simple hearts more gladly than that of those refined by human instrumentality, even the holiest. He loves the artless yearnings of untainted minds. Virgin soil attracts His husbandry by preference. And all experience shows the peculiar force of sacramental grace upon youthful minds untouched by the iron of man's art, unfashioned and unpolished by other hands than God's own. If this be true of ordinary existence, it is especially so of the breathings of a patient soul writhing under the scourge of adversity.

St. Paul (2 Cor. vi. 4-6) enumerates the virtues of the Christian, and he begins with patience—"much patience." This is the only one of his lengthy list to which he gives an adjective—"much patience," until he comes to the last and greatest: "charity unfeigned." An honor this for patience. And indeed the whole peril of the pilgrim is lest he shall be deficient in patience and insincere in charity.

The apostolic contrast of strength and weakness is thus expressed: "Gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Cor. xii. 9). Could anything be straighter against the world's wisdom? A logician would run St. Paul to this absurdity: weakness is equal to strength. The Apostle instantly accepts: "When I am weak, then am I powerful," and he goes yet deeper into this divine absurdity: "For which cause I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ" (2 Cor. xii. 10).

The divine use of affliction is that it elicits the prayer of patience, which never goes far astray from Calvary's bounty. "When thou shalt seek the Lord thy God," said Moses to Israel, "thou shalt find Him; yet so if thou seek Him with all thy heart and all the affliction of thy soul" (Deut. iv. 29). God's shadow is more healthful than the world's sunshine, to use a saying of St. Francis de Sales. Visitations of sorrow dredge a channel deep and wide for the stream of heavenly consolations sure to

flow into it in due time; consolations and divine guidance. For wisdom, according to Job, is "not found in the land of them that live in delights" (Job xxviii. 13).

Abandonment to God's will is itself a consecration to a life of perfection. Whosoever keeps the rule of patience takes God for his novice master. Seldom do sick men appreciate how directly they are being brought under God's leadership. Any serious consideration of the lot of man, shows conditions of trial so universal, that all must agree that heaven's best favor is fortitude in adversity, patience in pain and bereavement. What else can be God's purpose in our miseries but the universal offer of the grace of patience? Must not the office of suffering be great in quality and extensive in scope, since Providence has made it coextensive with human existence? Atonement for sin is its primary privilege. But there is another, which Bishop Hedley states in his *Book of Retreat*: "Suffering gives a certain kind of intensity to acts of the will, which nothing can give. This is what recommended it to the Heart of Jesus (a Heart desirous of proving to men the reality and the depth of its love)." And the same author quotes St. Thomas: "The first cause of the Passion was that Christ wished it to be known how much God loved man." The first cause, then, of man's suffering, is to show how much man can love God both by sharing in Christ's atonement and in intensifying his heart's love.

Submission to the divine will is an inevitable virtue: I may be obedient or I may be prayerful, but I must be patient. Sooner or later one must turn in his agony to his nearest associates and cry with blessed Job: "Have mercy upon me, have mercy upon me, at least you my friends, for the hand of the Lord hath touched me" (Job xix. 21). A man before and after a long illness is two different men. If a Christian, he is advanced into a new being of chastened self-mastery; if a worldling, he is sunk into degeneracy, for he has willfully refused the divine discipline. Some men hate afflictions, and these are worldlings; some without hating, dread them, and these are timid Christians; others

though dreading them yet appreciate their place in God's plan, receive them calmly, and then even thankfully. To that class all of us are called. Nor should we flinch from aspiring to the class beyond, namely, those who seek suffering by preference, as did our Master. "I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke xii. 50).

One sometimes projects a good work after much prayer, feeling that God is with him—and the result is failure. What then? Amid disappointments, misunderstandings, calumnies, and failures, God is still to be thanked as the origin of the undertaking. The work though a failure in itself, is a success as a stimulant to confidence in the divine goodness. The Lord praised David: "Whereas, thou hast thought in thy heart to build a house to My Name, thou hast done well" (3 Kings viii. 18)—yet would He not have David but David's son build His temple. The grace of bearing his disappointment was a better gift from God to David, than the honor of building and dedicating the temple.

In earlier Christian days, how often was the whole reliance of a community snatched away by martyrdom? Yet the people rejoiced; and God compensated them. Not only was it a happier lot to have advocates in heaven instead of leaders on earth, but conversions, the most unexpected, supplied the loss. This dispensation was not for the age of martyrs alone. It was in fulfillment of an invariable rule of Providence: "Give, and it shall be given to you, good measure" (Luke vi. 38), a rule that prevails as well in men's exchanges with divine Providence as with one another.

The martyrs, by making a virtue of necessity, have outranked all other kinds of saints in the liturgy of Holy Church. So should the bearing of arbitrarily inflicted injuries outrank other forms of holy charity towards men—contradictions and contempts, ignorings of merit and perverse misunderstandings of motives, bullying manners and violent tempers, disobedience of inferiors



and suspicions of superiors. These seem little when set against the rack and the wild beasts of our heroic ancestors, yet they are often harder to bear. Suffer them with joy and they win you a martyr's crown; suffer unto blood, that is unto annihilation of all human favor, do it willingly, gladly. You are young? Be glad for God's sake that it is said of you: he is too eager, he is ambitious, opinionated, silly. Old? Be content to hear that you have survived your usefulness and are played out, are reactionary, are a hindrance and should be turned down. Pray to God to give you much of this kind of suffering; some of it is surely well merited by your sins, all of it elevates motives and humbles pride.

Just as meritorious, and alas, far oftener available, is abandonment to God in the misery of our remorse of conscience. We cannot too brightly realize that God works at His best—if we dare so speak—in drawing good out of evil, nay, that it is the lowest evil that, as it were, provokes Him to the highest good. When my past sinfulness agonizes me, then, O God, lead my anxious spirit into the inner chambers of holy trustfulness, that I may there abandon myself to Thee for pardon and salvation. Herein is the penitent's road to that goal of predestination known as recollectedness of spirit, which is defined as a tendency to consider the present things of earth with a mind preoccupied with the future things of eternity. Who cannot hold his own against the bitterest tauntings of men and devils, if he can only say with the Psalmist: "The princes sat and spoke against me; but Thy servant was employed in Thy justifications" (Ps. cxviii. 23).

Proceed quietly; be not much interested in anything except in the routine of prayerful exercises, and herein seek that quiet which abandons all to God. Commend afflictions to Him, joys in like manner; absorb all attention in utilizing the means and methods of keeping mentally close to Him without easily leaving Him. Make the paramount interest of life an uninterrupted offering of loving submission to God. This doctrine is indeed unanimously taught, but it is very little known and less practised.

Its application is best illustrated by God's using dire calamity as a vocation to extraordinary sanctity. Take an instance from among the hermits of the fourth century. One of them was a famous master of holiness known as Paul the Simple. In the world he had been a poor man of the lowest state of life. When he was sixty years old his wife proved false to him. A deadly misfortune was this, and Paul fell under the blow, but only to recover quickly, and to recognize the hand of God beckoning him to a high degree of sanctity among the anchorites of Egypt.

We read of the gift of tears among holy souls; and the gift of tongues was a marvelous apostolic attribute. But St. Chrysostom, treating of St. Paul's imprisonments, speaks of another: the gift of chains. "If," says he, "I might have had my choice to stand with the angels near God's throne on high, or to be bound with St. Paul, I would have preferred the dungeon. Would you rather have been the angel loosing Peter, or Peter in chains? I would rather have been Peter. This gift of chains is something greater than to stop the sun, to move the world, or to command devils" (quoted by Alban Butler, June 30). We now and then read of a dying man begging to have some love token inclosed with his corpse in his coffin. It is related of Babylus, a martyr bishop of Antioch, who died in prison for the faith in the persecution of Decius, that he begged that his chains might be buried with him in his grave. Such are the love-tokens of God's heroes.

Even in little things thoughtful souls find a divine greatness. The clock striking the hours tells of the eternal years; the wind tossing the dust in the street tells of the vanity of human strivings. Not only the wheels of life, but every little cog upon them is recognized as part of the divine plan. What, then, must be the lessons taught by the death of our dear ones, or by the annihilation of our own bodily forces. To a discerning mind the outward order of our life, whether in little things or great, is in direct contact with the invisible Prime Mover Himself. What of our soul's little whirlwinds of joy or great tempests of sor-

row? To a spiritual man all thought is union with God. Thinking, for instance, of Jesus on His hidden throne in a church, abandoning oneself absolutely to Him there, at Mass, at and after Holy Communion—is not this high spirituality? Hence the Apostle's reproach to the Galatians that they would not give up wholly to God, though they were men, "before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been set forth, crucified" (Gal. iii. 1). Of all happenings in heaven or earth that of the Eucharist is supreme; no less so in its teachings than in its graces.

A mark of Christian character is constant advertence to an overruling Providence. As Jesus saw His Father in every event even the most trifling, so in like manner does the Christian whose heart Christ has taken possession of. O what a joy, when human motives of placid acceptance of the inevitable find themselves elevated into divine impulses of abandonment to a Father's care, making the most ordinary things of life all heavenly. This is the best granting of the prayer: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." To yield allegiance to God in all the varying circumstances of life, whether petty or grave, is the mark of a recollected man, nay, it actually is self-recollection. Such a one, responsive to the inner touches of the Holy Spirit, is from that very fact careful not to forget the external guidance of Providence, and he scrutinizes the most minute signs of divine love. A sparrow is cheap; yet "one of them doth not fall upon the ground without your heavenly Father" (Matt. x. 29). The hairs of my head grow unnoticed and soon are wasted; yet "a hair of your head shall not perish" (Luke xxi. 18). God is found supreme in His bounty among the tiny flutterers of the grove: "your heavenly Father feedeth them" (Matt. vi. 26); and He is revealed in His sovereign beauty amid the waving grass of the meadow: "I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these" (Matt. vi. 29). Divine majesty is amazingly revealed in a drop of water under the microscope. An infinite purpose of unity is shown in the anatomy of a little moth. God is in all things and in every par-

ticular thing, eliciting thanksgiving, adoration, awe, and above all confidence in His Fatherly care.

Simply a general view of God's guidance is not adequate, nor conscious acceptance of it in matters of supreme importance only. God's current influence is, as a rule, more potent to sanctify than His occasional and decisive interference, which is usually but the sum and completion of His current teachings. These have occupied God, and should have absorbed us for years perhaps. God in everything and ourselves in God, is another expression of making a virtue of necessity.

The greater changes of Providential rule throw us back upon the lesser; upon one littlest point can God turn the vast universe of our destiny. A priest in vigorous health once said to Father Hecker—whose long agony of pain was soon to end in death—that he felt full of courage. Father Hecker answered: "That is the way I used to feel. I used to say: O Lord! I feel as if I had the whole world on my shoulders, and all I've got to say is, O Lord, I'm sorry you've given me such small potatoes to carry on my back. But now—well, when a mosquito comes in, I say: Mosquito, have you any good to do me? Yes? Then I thank you, for I am glad to get good from a mosquito."

## XVIII.

### STRIVING FOR THE MASTERY, OR CHRISTIAN SELF-DENIAL.

THE good things of this natural life of ours, are rated by a religious spirit, not so much according to their intrinsic value, which is little, but according to their exchange value, the priceless good of the interior life. Thus food and drink for the body can, by abstinence, be exchanged for heavenly fortitude of the soul; the company of men, can, by holy solitude, be exchanged for the company of God. The saints always felt bound to be doing or not doing something or other, whereby they would feel this life to be a pilgrimage to a better life; and they longed for death as the changing of a pilgrim's weeds for the eternal wedding raiment. Blessed Henry Suso says: "The exercise of refraining from things gives men more power than the actual possession of the things." Otherwise expressed: Mastery of self is better than ownership of the good things of life. Who had not rather rule his appetites than revel at banquets? "Everyone that striveth for the mastery refraineth himself from all things, and they indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible one" (1 Cor. ix. 25). "Everyone"—all are called to this striving, and this crown; "from all things;" the universe is filled with our opportunities to win control of our appetites, both lawful and unlawful. In enjoying our rights over creatures, we are liable to be enslaved by our own bondsmen. Our appetites and passions are constantly playing the substitute for reason and grace. There is no tyrant so cruel as a revolted slave.

Father Hecker used to quote approvingly a maxim of Brook Farm: "A gross feeder will never be a central thinker." Heav-



only Wisdom itself proclaims the inaptitude of a soft nature for a noble-hearted career of any kind. "He that loveth good cheer shall be in want; he that loveth wine, and fat things, shall not be rich" (Prov. xxi. 17). Yet both corporal and spiritual self-indulgence constantly challenge the right of reason to control them.

The sensualist says: "I live to eat;" the philosopher says "I eat to live;" the Christian says: "I eat to learn how to die." That prodigal abundance leads to sensuality is notorious: "Behold this was the iniquity of Sodom thy sister; pride, fullness of bread, and abundance, and the idleness of her and of her daughters" (Ezech. xvi. 49). Sodom is a name linked to lust in its basest form, yet the Lord by His prophet declares its iniquity to be what was its cause: luxurious and slothful living.

Blosius speaks of affliction as the solid food of God's elect. Beware then of even spiritual dainties, look suspiciously on your sweeter devotional moods; do not rate them too high. God's favors are to be valued by the quality of love they elicit: a love as content to be full as to be hungry, "both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. iv. 12); impartial between joy and sorrow; a love that is fervent amid coldness and nakedness of spirit—love for God as faith reveals Him, and entirely for His own sake. Why argue? Look at the Life and Passion of Christ. Read the history of Christian sanctity. In the earlier era of the Church, every virtue was practised as a preparation for martyrdom—one's whole life was a novitiate for martyrdom, and all that was done was bent to train the soul for that supreme test. And even now, if one were chaste and truthful, devout and obedient, humble and charitable with a view to the ultimate offering of every human joy to God in a martyrdom of love, his every virtue would be set in the right perspective, along the way of the cross: "And He said to all: If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke ix. 23).

This much stands clear: some amount of self-conquest is

of obligation, not only by Church law, but by immediate divine law. It is necessitated by the disjointed relation of reason to appetite, for that "the flesh lusteth against the spirit" (Gal. v. 17), is as certain as is our miserable sinfulness. And the flesh must be subdued as an unbroken horse is subdued—by the infliction of pain. Cruelly disordered, too, is the relation of man's reason and his will towards God; he is fearfully inclined to rebellion, and he must be bitted and bridled and reined, and wholly harnessed by the stern mastery of the fear of eternal damnation before he can so much as begin to work out his salvation.

Both in its spirit and its methods, the subjection of appetite to reason, and of reason to God is to the majority of mankind downright foolishness. To renounce lawful pleasures to yield to adversaries; to associate suffering with joy as cause and effect; to make submission to equals and inferiors the goal of ambitious striving; to prefer the invisible and the absent to the visible and the present. All this undeniably foolishness in the eyes of men generally is, in the eyes of the predestinated, just as undeniably "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. i. 24).

Henry Dorie, one of our Corean martyrs, doubtless loved his native France with all the ardor usual to his countrymen; but he loved the land of his terrible vocation better; and when his friends lamented his holy banishment from home, he was wont to say: "Is any country a foreign land to one whose home is only in heaven?" To one who is truly detached his dearer home is that whose vestibule is martyrdom. Live here, if you dare, as if you really belonged to another world. Associate in that spirit with your fellowmen, eat and drink, and work and talk, and rest and think, as if about to depart out of the land of Egypt for the land of promise. Alas, I love this life. I cherish the visible world, and I fight shy of the invisible. I am a man of the present and not of the future, and I cannot deny it. What shall I do, O God, my God? What can I do but lament and mourn my shortsightedness, and crave

that powerful feeling of exile bestowed through the dispensation of affliction: "For I know," said the Most High by His prophet, "that the people will not hear me, for they are a people of a stiff neck; but they shall turn to their heart in the land of their captivity" (Baruch ii. 30).

When Adam was driven out of the earthly paradise, he was forbidden to seek a new one anywhere short of heaven, and that fiat was perpetual. Since then it has not ceased to be God's will that every child of Adam should feel himself a child banished from home for his crimes, and living in the world, as in a penal colony. Of every single human being it is true that he is a stranger and a pilgrim, to be rewarded finally with the home joys of heaven, only in proportion to the evenness of mind with which he shall have borne his exile on earth (1 Peter ii. 11; Heb. xi. 13).

St. Lawrence Justinian never drank so much as a drop of water between meals. When urged to do so, in the excessive heat of midsummer, he said: "If we cannot bear this thirst now, how shall we endure the fire of purgatory." He was thought to be a visionary. But as a matter of fact, is there any wisdom more practical than making ready for a crucial test of endurance in the future than by severe exercise in the present. "Everyone that striveth for the mastery, refraineth himself from all things" (1 Cor. ix. 25). The advantage of Christian mortification is double—it both hardens one to the inevitable suffering of purgatory, and shortens the same by providing a timely substitute. An ancient Father in a monastery once saw a vision during meal time. Three of the monks were eating the very same food, yet it seemed to him that what one ate was honey, what another ate was bread, and what the third one ate was dirt. He was much puzzled by this. But presently an angel instructed him. "Those who eat honey are such as sit down to table with fear lest they shall over indulge their appetite, and whilst eating never cease praying. Those who eat bread are those who contentedly and thankfully enjoy what God has given

them. Those who eat dirt are those who grumble, and say to themselves, 'I don't like this, and I can't eat that, and I wish I had the other.' "

Read the writings of St. John of the Cross, and you will find two things: First, that the praise of self-denial, radical and emphatic indeed, and given as a necessary condition of the diviner kinds of prayer, is only occasional, while the whole series of books is mainly occupied with descriptions of the interior steps towards perfect contemplation. But read the Saint's biography, and you find the proportions reversed. Here there is a word now and then about his states of prayer; a brief chapter or two about the phenomena of his inner union with God, while almost the whole volume is occupied with the narrative of his mortifications, his misfortunes, and the persecutions to which he was subjected. So it is with nearly all the saints. The entire spiritual career of every true Christian is occupied first by the elimination of defects, by mortification; but this is at best the preparation and constant accompaniment of the really formative influences, which are the secret communications with the Holy Spirit. One is never without the other. The outward phenomena are seen of men plainly enough; the inward only fully revealed in Paradise.

It is astonishing how many of the saints practised great austerities in spite of delicate health. They were entitled to dispensation from even the ordinary fasts of the Church, but they had such courageous hearts that they surpassed men of giant physical strength in bodily mortification. In truth fortitude is not measured by weight of brawn, or tested by the quality of the digestive organs. The battle of the cross is not to the physically strong. Perhaps the most marvelous thing of all in the lives of saintly bishops and priests, is that they permitted their apostolic labors to consume all the hours of daylight, and for their prayers robbed themselves of the hours of sleep, the body's most necessary refreshment. Before them was the example of their divine Master, Who often "passed the whole night in the prayer of God" (Luke vi. 12).



"Unto you it is given for Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him" (Phil. i. 29). Would that I could realize the privilege of suffering. Faith, O Lord, is a gift of Thy bounty; "it is given to me" to believe. But of all my beliefs the very weakest is that it is a privilege to suffer for Thee. Strengthen my faith in that particular, O Jesus Crucified. May I come at last actually to relish suffering for Thy sake.

Let one but admit that he is called to perfection, and the next step is to realize what perfection means to a follower of Christ, the garden, the *prætorium*, the cross. Jesus Himself was not more surely doomed to suffer than is each one of His earnest followers: to suffer from Satan "who hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke xxii. 31); from my fellowmen: "I have chosen you out of the world, therefore doth the world hate you" (John xv. 19); from my own perverse self: "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh" (Gal. v. 17). Sorrow and trouble arise from every quarter, and assail an elect soul. "Ships travel faster in a storm than in a calm, citizens prove their love for country better in a war than in peace," wrote St. John of Avila to a friend who was serving God in adversity.

Self-renunciation, when genuine, is a deep searching sentiment, for often a high opinion of our labors or merits lurks hidden in the recesses of our hearts. We discover it by being put to the test of men's disapproval; if we do not readily refer the case wholly to God, if we harbor the least resentment, the secret is out: our motives in serving God have had some taint of self-interest, vainglory, or even of fretfulness and sourness. St. Cyprian tells of a vision granted by God to a certain man, in which a voice said to him: "Thou art afraid to suffer in this life, and yet unwilling to go hence; what shall I do with thee?" There is positively no other alternative—suffer here, or risk the suffering of purgatory there. Heaven is the only state free from this rule, and heaven is the reward of this rule's observance.

A mariner's compass must be raised above the level, and



must be poised on a fine point, then it swings easily towards the Pole. So a true Christian must be elevated in spirit, and balanced nicely on that point of honor and of principle that is called detachment from created things. Turn such a one which ever way you please, he always points to God. What good is the magnetic needle lying flat on the ground? One little point of earth is all it needs, more than this destroys its usefulness. So with a genuine Christian, his earthly support must be reduced to a minimum to develop the maximum of his sensitiveness towards heaven. "Unless a man be elevated in spirit, and set at liberty from all created things and entirely united to God, whatsoever he knows and whatsoever he has is of no great worth." This pregnant summary of the reason of mortification taken from à Kempis, Father Hecker wrote out, and pinned above his desk, and he constantly repeated it during his years of bitterest suffering.

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot possess the kingdom of God, neither shall corruption possess incorruption" (1 Cor. xv. 50). A body fit for heaven is a spiritual body, its vices and concupiscences subdued, the animal nature reduced under the mastery of the spiritual—a truly divine achievement—every appetite wholly subject to reason, reason in turn wholly subject to grace. The most superficial knowledge of our bodily selves reveals the innate unreason of fleshly tendencies; and the least experience in managing this evil proves the need of rigorous, even violent measures of suppression.

To burn with admiration whilst reading of the martyrs is no great offering to God—such flames are sometimes even less than painted fire. But it is better than nothing, infinitely better than not even reading about our religion's heroes. Invincible fortitude was theirs, peaceful admiration mine. Armed only with the love of Christ, the martyrs were more than a match for the ancient Romans, the conquerors of the world. But what am I a match for? What am I armed with? They were glad to be flung to wild beasts; they blithely stepped forth to be roasted

alive for Christ. Dare I compare myself with them? Yet I am resolved to do enough of mortification to escape the reproach of being an utter coward.

Let us not be greatly surprised at the small number of the fervent. Shall we expect the whole world to run after a way of living in which one must persuade himself that he gains more by losing this earth's goods than by retaining them? It may be objected that one may see God and love God in His creatures. Certainly; theoretically one may point out how reasonable it is to rise in thought from the creature to its Creator, and methods for doing so may be suggested. But when the test of actual practice is applied, we find it nothing short of heroic. Readily to rise from the corporal life to the spiritual is a proof of rare holiness. The seen does not teach the unseen without a mighty effort on the part of the learner; nor does the temporal incline us to love the eternal by any natural movement of the affections, except in spirits of rare native endowments. It is precisely in this that mankind shows itself a fallen race. In our pristine state, the Garden of Eden was so enchanting as to be fit for a meeting place between God and man. But of what pleasure garden of this sin-blighted world can it now be said, that the sight of its beauties and the enjoyment of its fruitfulness banish sensuality?

Each man has just so much aptitude, or rather, capacity, for communication with other creatures, and no more. Deprived of one object he seeks another, for he is made by God to seek and enjoy companionship. Now God has a prior, a divine right to our companionship, and the secret of the spiritual life is the concentration of this communing upon God. Our part of the process is withdrawal from all other objects, and the bestowal of our thoughts and our affections upon God. God's part, as we soon find, is that He most effectively elicits our soul's longings, and gradually absorbs its attentions and fixes its love upon Himself. But not without constant resistance from us. The interior history of every man consists of the

record of God's increasing invitations to his soul to leave all else, and take up solitary company with his divine Lover, and the soul's tricks and evasions to procrastinate the final and irrevocable acceptance of this invitation. "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: If you return and be quiet, you shall be saved; in silence and in hope shall your strength be" (Is. xxx. 15). Nor is this divine monopoly of companionship injurious to the rights of our fellowmen; for one purpose of God in drawing us to Himself is to fit us with His own divine qualities for making men happy, and in that condition to restore us to their society.

## XIX.

### THE MIGHT OF THE INWARD MAN.

ORIGEN was a famous defender of Christ and His Church in early Christian times. Leonides, his father (who afterwards died a martyr), had him baptized in infancy, and used to go to his cradle while the child was asleep, uncover his breast, and reverently kiss it, saying that it was the shrine in which the Holy Ghost was lodged. He had in mind St. Paul's teaching: "Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. iii. 16.)

It is true that all of God's works which are extrinsic to Himself, are common to the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. But the Holy Scriptures and the saints and theologians of the Church, and indeed the Church herself, attribute to the Third Person the work of our sanctification. A conspicuous and dogmatic instance of this is found in the canons of the Council of Trent: "If anyone shall say that without the inspiration and help of the Holy Spirit going beforehand, a man can believe, hope, love or repent as he ought, so that the grace of justification may be conferred on him: let him be anathema."\*

Thus God is Himself the immediate source of all our good, as far as it makes for a happy eternity; He is so by a most intimate union with our souls and a constant guidance of them. This is variously named the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the inspira-

\*"Si quis dixerit, sine praeveniente Spiritus Sancti inspiratione, atque ejus adjutorio, hominem credere, sperare, diligere aut poenitere posse, sicut oportet, ut ei justificationis gratia conferatur; anathema sit." (*Con. Trid.*, sess. vi., can. iii.)

tion of grace, the inner voice of God; and our part is called co-operation, fidelity to interior divine guidance, correspondence with grace; and very generally it is named fidelity to conscience. This condition is the object of the Apostle's prayer for his converts: "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened by His Spirit with might unto the inward man" (Eph. iii. 16)—strengthened in their thoughts and affections directly by God's own holiness, nay by His very Self. Albertus Magnus was once asked for an edifying thought, and he gave it thus: "Man receives God spiritually in his soul, as the priest receives Him corporally at the altar; and this happens every time that through love of Him he abstains from some fault, even though it be but a word or a glance."

Oftentimes, when even instructed and faithful Christians are bid to seek God in their own hearts, they often feel as if they were directed to journey into an unexplored country. They can hardly imagine that there is an inner sanctuary of God which is all their own, and in which the closest divine intimacy is ever awaiting them, yea, is awaiting even the newly penitent. "I ask but one thing of you," wrote Fénelon to a recently repentant friend, "which is to follow in simplicity the bent of your own mind for goodness, as you have formerly followed your earthly passions in pursuit of evil. Believe, then, your own heart, to which God, Whom you have so long forgotten, is now speaking in love, notwithstanding its ingratitude." No, it must not be supposed that the intimate guidance of the Holy Spirit is limited to persons of the higher spiritual grades. When, indeed, one's strivings are winning maturity of virtue, God's influence seems closer and His guiding hand stronger. But even in the earlier stages of an earnest man's progress, a light rises within him showing him his daily imperfections, revealing his past sins in their native ugliness, and at the same time urging him strenuously to constant increase of the two means of sanctification that lie most in his power, namely, purification of his present life from the least defects, and the doing of penitential works for a more



adequate atonement of the past. The Holy Spirit is as well the master of novices as the perfecter of proficients. In the one case no less than the other, the soul must beware of resisting the admonitions of its Heavenly Guide, lest His voice be silenced. For guidance high and low the prayer of the Psalmist must be offered: "Show, O Lord, Thy ways to me, and teach me Thy paths. Direct me in Thy truth and teach me; for Thou art God my Savior; and on Thee have I waited all the day long" (Ps. xxiv. 4, 5). Be it remembered, too, that this grace of divine guidance comes through the sacraments, whose influence is both inner and outer, abiding with us interiorly through the indwelling Spirit: "Because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, Who is given to us" (Rom. v. 5)—by Christ in His sacraments. Certainly it is a most blessed and delightful privilege thus to pass back and forth between the divine world of Holy Church's worship and ordinances, and the paradise of God's grace within our own minds.

God makes Himself felt and understood to everyone who offers himself to His interior guidance. This does not change the substance of a virtuous life, but reveals its obedience and humility and prayer and charity as the direct result of immediate divine union. It does not make us feel like prophets of God, whose inspiration is quite different, but it makes us know, in a light all calm and joyful, that we are children of God. It is not a mission to work miracles, but an invitation from the depths of the soul to give up self-guidance, and follow the maxims of the Gospel under the very eye of the Deity Himself. How truly does St. Chrysostom say: that nothing so effectually cures a fault as the continual remembrance of God.

How can we know that we are surely receiving God's secret communications? Is there any plain sign? The *Curé* of Ars gives an answer as clear as it is adequate: "When good thoughts come into our mind, we may be sure that the Holy Ghost is visiting us." Does your impulse incite you to do what is evidently good, or does it beckon you towards debatable ground? Is the

after-feeling one of peace, or rather one of unrest? Is it accompanied by affection for superiors, or censoriousness? Has the new impulse come with discontent, a desire of change, or with tranquillity? Have you confidence that God will aid you to carry out these inward suggestions, and are you willing to abide His time, or are you hot for instant action? Instability is a bad sign; for in all graver matters God's drawing is continuous and gentle, yet peremptorily insistent, but never away from your usual obedience. By this means it is that a pious soul is trained into a real spirituality. All that is meant by sound judgment is granted the soul in full measure, so that it "judgeth all things" in its life prudently, being made by its interior lights competent spiritually to examine them (1 Cor. ii. 15). St. Francis de Sales, echoing the traditional teaching, goes so far as to promise that fidelity to inner guidance fits one to perceive the divine approval, even in spiritual matters of everyday occurrence. "A servitor of heavenly inspirations," he says, "knows at what time, in what order, by what method, each virtue must be practised" (*Letters to Persons in the World*, Mackey, p. 18).

The guidance of the Holy Ghost bestows the force of God upon human endeavor, and gives the Church the benefit of souls filled with holy initiative. But what is here meant by initiative? What is not meant is this: to act of a sudden, even when the cause is good and the interior impulse is sane, strong and religious. Nor to act in grave matters without the counsel of devout and peaceful and experienced men. Nor yet to savor novelties with joy, and eagerly to search them out. No. Initiative is not to act without good advice, nor from love of innovation, nor with precipitation.

But initiative is to seek diligently for new ways of glorifying God without forfeiting old ways, least of all criticizing them. Initiative is the spirit of the explorer and the pioneer, especially in spreading God's faith and His Church. It is to have confidence amid adverse circumstances, and to look for a betterment of religious conditions, quickly lending a hand to bring this

about. It is to covet and ask the place of toil and of danger in dealing with God's enemies.

Initiative is that spirit which makes little of one's own deficiencies when duty or opportunity calls for action: and constantly to make opportunity stand for duty. To have an adventurous spirit in religious undertakings. To be the first to advance when authority says "Go!" and the first (however sadly) to stop when authority says "Halt!" Never to allow oneself "to think" (we quote Father Hecker) "or to express a word which might seem to place a truth of the Catholic faith in doubt, or to savor of the spirit of disobedience. With all this in view, to be the most earnest and ardent friend of all true progress, and to work with all one's might for its promotion through existing organizations and authorities."\*

Some say, or would wish they had the courage to say, that all this is but theoretical if not visionary; and that it interferes with a common sense management of religious affairs. Well, some would manage supernatural activities, such as all departments of the care of souls, including the education of children, by the rules of worldly policy. These aspire to the shrewdness of worldlings in dealing with immortal souls. They would attend to divine things in a human spirit. Others adopt, indeed, methods and means of a human kind, but they are guided by the lights acquired from prayer, holy Mass and their communions. Which kind of wisdom is the better for a workaday life of zeal? St. Francis Xavier, one of the most successful among practical soul-savers, declares for the latter. Speaking of some details in the management of hard sinners, he wrote: "But to understand when this is proper to be done, how far to proceed, and with

\*True initiative was illustrated by St. Francis de Sales throughout his whole career. He composed his first sermon whilst yet a young man in deacon's orders, and preached it on Pentecost—a discourse on the descent of the Holy Ghost. He was the least innovating, and at the same time most holily venturesome, of God's servants. Read his chapters on Inspirations in the *Devout Life* and in the *Love of God* for a full and perfect treatment of the great doctrine here so scantily and defectively given.

what precautions, is what the guidance of the Spirit and your own experience must teach you at the particular time and occasion" (*Life*, by Coleridge, vol. ii., p. 117). And again, when arranging for the instruction of converts: "After they have professed their belief in all that the Church teaches, the catechist instructs them to pray to the Holy Ghost for His seven gifts, those especially which can help them to believe the Catholic faith" (*Life*, by Coleridge, vol. i., p. 167).

It is sometimes alleged that this rule of following God's Spirit in all things applies entirely to recluses, and is adapted only to contemplatives. No, not by any means. There is no guidance of the Deity so plain as that which makes men perform their usual duty of prayer, whether it be the prattling of the child in his petitions, the anguish of the stricken sinner, or the rapture of the saint. When you feel inclined to pray for a lawful object, you are now under the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit. If that inclination be unusually strong, if it be persistent, even vehement, O rejoice and be glad, for it means the getting in due time of a favor of more than ordinary value. If it be a painful yet peaceful feeling, having in it the stings of remorse or the forebodings of danger, O pray harder and harder, for these are divine warnings against perdition.

No interior condition is more surely an inspiration from God than an enduring tendency to observe a daily rule of mental prayer. As to even the method of meditation, that, too, in its more deep flowing currents, is ordered by no other than the divine power within us. A full knowledge of St. Ignatius and his method of meditation, leaves little doubt that his method was inspired. "So high and sovereign is the exercise of mental prayer," says De Ponte in the first paragraph of his wonderful book of *Meditations*, "in which we meditate upon the mysteries of our holy faith, and converse familiarly with Almighty God, that the principal master of it can be no other than the Holy Ghost Himself. The holy Fathers learnt it by His inspiration, and they have left us many documents of much importance,



how to exercise it with profit, following the motion of that principal Master." And later on that author returns with emphasis to the same teaching: "True it is that the greatest certainty in these petitions and colloquies depends principally upon the Holy Spirit, Who, as St. Paul says, 'asks for us with unspeakable groanings' (Rom. viii. 26). For with His inspiration He teaches us, and moves us to ask, ordering our petitions, and stirring up those affections with which they are to be made."

Much of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in earlier years by far the greater part, is granted us for resistance to evil. What gave the martyrs their crown? Resistance to idolatrous laws; the sovereignty of the one true God demanded that of them in their soul's interior. The same help is needed for our own daily martyrdom: "I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind and captivating me in the law of sin" (Rom. vii. 23). To hold one's own against our inward evil tendencies needs the inward "inspiration and help" of the principle of good—God. As a room is aired, so is a soul purified. Is a room foul? Open wide the windows, all of them, and all the doors; and the pure air and bright sunshine cleanses everything, dries up all foul dampness, leaves everything clean and sweet. O my soul, open thy windows and doors wide and free, and call God's Spirit within thee. Despondency flees and hope returns; doubts are dried up like malarious damp. God has come, bright and sweet, all powerful and all loving. Prayer is become the breathing in of God's holiness; self-denial is made the confession of God's supremacy. Two things will give thee highest joy, and these two are one: the first is that thou shalt be made conscious that this purifying of thy life is the infinite God Himself; the second is, that it is love, nay it is loving union, for "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. vi. 17).

How great the boon of knowing that what wakes my soul out of the torpor of worldliness is the living God Himself, Whose force is infinite love, Whose action is the communication of Himself; that what is moving and softening and wounding and healing



my affections, lighting up the dark places, plucking out evil habits, thawing out what was frozen, is the infinite and eternal Deity Himself. Nor is there in this any essential difference, as we have already said, between souls high and low in the ranks of God's friends. For St. Bernard testifies: "From the time of God's entrance into the interior of my soul, He has never made His presence known by any extraordinary tokens, either by voice or by visible appearance. I have felt His activity only by the movement of my heart; and I have experienced His active power by the amendment of my vices, by the mortification of carnal passions, by the penitent view of my faults, by the renewal of my life, by the enlarged vision of all things which show forth His greatness" (*Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles*).

Weakness of conviction of the dogma of the indwelling Spirit is the reason of partial failure in many religious careers. It is especially the explanation of what is known as dissipation of spirit. The mind of an unrecollected man is like an unfenced orchard, whose fruits are not for the owner but for all passers-by—a comparison used by St. Francis de Sales. The inner divine voice is drowned by the demands of undisciplined nature, filling the soul with excuses and questionings, and clamors for favors and demands for "rights." Sensuality, even when it is not gross, yet deadens the mind to what à Kempis calls the "divine whisperings," which die away amid the pleasures of the table or the comforts of an easy life. Even the innocent desires of the heart, such as craving for the company of friends and relatives, may easily confuse, perhaps wholly deaden, the tones of that voice, which will make its plea for love only amid the silence of all other lovers. The result is that multitudes of souls become good and never grow better. One does religious acts and does not think religious thoughts; and finally becomes like the man in the prophesy: "As he that is thirsty, dreameth and drinketh, and after he is awake is yet faint with thirst, and his soul is empty" (Is. xxix. 8).

Fidelity to the interior influences of grace, beginning, in the

case of ordinary souls, with the voice of God in conscience and ending with the terrible self-exactions of the nobler kind of natures—those who are called to emulate the angels in holiness—fidelity to the inner divine Master is the fundamental virtue of religion. Even saints find cause for regret in their faulty exercise of it. For example, Blessed Mother Barat, although she was imbued with a worshipful obedience to God's external authority, yet wrote to the Venerable Mother Duchesne, at a difficult crisis of the Sacred Heart Congregation which she had founded: "The fruits of an exact fidelity to the Spirit of our Lord are immeasurable. I have but one regret in the world, and that is not to have been always faithful to It. O if I had to live over again, I would listen only to the Holy Spirit, and act simply by His inspirations (*Life*, by Baunard, vol. i., ch. x.). How well do the saints know that every attribute of the Deity is expended upon us in the guidance of the Holy Ghost. As God is, so is He my guide. His immensity envelops me everywhere; His majesty appals me in my sinfulness; His goodness melts the hardness of my heart—a most miraculous victory. And in all this His touch arouses my consciousness that I am under immediate divine control.

The guidance of the Holy Ghost is thus both a mark of progress and its rule. It is also the promise of final perseverance. A man's blood grows weak and thin with age. But his soul's blood, the grace of God, never ages. O Holy Spirit of God, Thou art eternal life, and Thou art my life. The force of Thy inspirations grows stronger with the weakening of the forces of my natural life. Virtue is beautiful forever. Love blooms eternally. O how much purer is the life of God within my thoughts than the life of man that is in my blood and wrapped about me in my flesh. The one is always dying most miserably, the other ever increasing in vigor, as our Savior promised: "The water that I will give him, shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting" (John iv. 14).

When everything in life is done because God inspires it, or

His providence arranges it and places its interior motives, this is perfection. Now the mission of the Spirit within the soul is love, love to be given, love to be obtained, and this reciprocal movement of love is to be the stream on which at the end is carried to heaven the merits of a lifetime. It is God Who inspires the soul with love of Himself as the supreme good, love of a son for his Father, of a spouse for his Spouse, or a brother for his Brother. As these relations exist in God's own inner life of Father, Son, and Spirit, so are they transferred to the inner life of the human soul, and thus to that soul God is made all in all. "The estate of the divine union," says St. John of the Cross, "consists of the total transformation of the will into the will of God in such a way that every movement of the will shall be always the movement of the will of God only" (*Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Book I., ch. xi.).

Let us conclude with the prayer of Holy Church in the Mass for Wednesday after the second Sunday of Lent: "O God, the restorer and lover of innocence, direct to Thyself the hearts of Thy servants: that the fervor of Thy Spirit being lighted within them, they may be found steadfast in faith, and effective in work. Amen."

## XX.

### PRAYER THE RESPONSE TO GRACE.

A POOR laborer in the parish of Ars used to spend hours on his knees before the Blessed Sacrament, his eyes fixed on the Tabernacle, but his lips never moving. The Curé asked him one day: "What do you say to our Lord all the time, my friend?" The simple soul replied: "I say just nothing at all; I only look at Him and He looks at me."

This is literally the "prayer of the simple view," a grade of contemplation, indeed, but one which is not quite absent from ordinary vocal and meditative prayer when offered with fervor. Now the great difference between a high and a low level of attention in prayer is this same fervor—it is the difference between accepting a regimen of devotional exercises as it is cut and dried by custom, and the capability of arranging the same on one's own account according to the "perfect law of liberty" (James i. 25).

Prayer is the soul's return stroke of grace. The heart drives the lung-cleansed blood throughout the body, and then sucks it back again to the lungs for fresh cleansing and enrichment, and renewed distribution. Grace projects God's love into our thoughts and affections, and prayer thankfully returns our thoughts and affections back again into God's heart for renewal. Thus prayer is the reaction of our souls upon God in search of a renewal of the divine bounty. Hence the necessity of prayer, the obligation of it, the efficacy of it, the joy of it. Hence the expressions met in Scripture and in all spiritual teaching: Everything depends on prayer.

Prayer antedates all other offices of religion, and pervades them all, even the sacraments. It is related to salvation as a

means indispensable to an end. It is the most universal of all helps to heaven. How seldom do we realize this full dignity in our morning and evening devotions. Take from me the Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of Penance, the Humanity of Christ in that of the Eucharist, and I can yet be saved by prayer. Give me both those great sacraments every day, and, without the responsive stroke of prayer steadily driven towards heaven, their infinite gifts lodge on the soul's surface, soon to be shaken off by the jostling of the world.

God grants our prayers because of "Christ Jesus, that died, yea that is risen also again; Who is at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. viii. 34). Also because of the virtues we practice in making our petitions; confidence in His love, humility, patient waiting. Another and very singular reason is given by our Savior, our importunity (Luke xi. 5-10); which plagues men into doing us a favor so that they be rid of us, and pleases God into granting it, because it is an appeal of love too peremptory for Him to resist: For Thy own dear sake, dear Lord; for Thy heavenly Father's sake; for Thy Blessed Mother's sake, who is helping me with her prayers; and in memory of Thy bitter death. Love's blind persistence and absolute perseverance, its total disregard of personal deserving or of anything else but its painful necessity and God's infinite goodness, this is prayer's forlorn hope, and it never fails of success. "Our Father Who art in heaven." If we speak to one another of our God, we call Him our heavenly Father. If we pray together, the Son of God says: "Thus therefore shall you pray: Our Father Who art in heaven" (Matt. vi. 9). O God, how great, nay, how divine, is the privilege of prayer, and how dimly do men appreciate it. "There never was a father so much a Father as God," says Tertullian. And what brother is so much a brother as He Who being God is yet Himself "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. viii. 29), and communicates to us His love for His Father from a heart similar to ours in all Its joys and sorrows.



The motives of prayer are graded by their disinterestedness. But, practically considered, the first of motives is penance for sin; for if sins be deeds, words and thoughts, atonement is principally made by words and thoughts in prayer. The penitent Psalmist knew it well: "My heart grew hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall flame out" (Ps. xxxviii. 4). The prayer of penance was granted this supremacy; it outranked every other prayer in gaining our redemption. The great prayer of Christ was His Agony in the Garden, a flaming fire of sorrow. The Agony in the Garden is the world's act of contrition. "Sit you here," He said to His Apostles, "till I go yonder and pray . . . . My soul is sorrowful even unto death" (Matt. xxvi. 36, 38).

The Lord has thus dignified purgative prayer because it is the most necessary, and is an essential condition of every other kind of prayer; because it bolts hell's door, and when made perseveringly, blocks it up with eternal adamant; because it is our most precious offering to the Father, costing the Blood of His Son; because it is the most difficult even to begin, and when begun, to continue to the end; finally, because it ministers to us our sweetest joy, the inward assurance of reconciliation with heaven. We must spend our lives perfecting this prayer, as our Redeemer spent His. How deep has been the wound of sin, since even its scar of half a century must be burnt and burnt again, to stop the oozing of its putrid recollections—burnt with scalding tears and fiery prayer of sorrow—to be succeeded with consolations of unspeakable solace. Of course we would not say that this penitential condition is always dominant in a perfect man, only that it is so at frequent intervals, and is always impending.

Men of science are deeply concerned with the study of heat and light as the ruling forces of nature, and both of these live in the air. In like manner those who study divine knowledge and love, the ruling elements of supernatural life, tell us that these are in prayer, as heat and light are in the atmosphere.

The warmth of the love of God thaws the ice of our cowardice; and the brightness of God's countenance generates the hope of heaven's glory. But as there are tempests in the air, with black darkness and forked lightning, so in prayer there is the deepest gloom of the "obscure night," and "from the throne proceedeth lightning and voices and thunders" (Apoc. iv. 5). Nevertheless these hard pressures of majesty, and shocks of divinity in our more recollected prayer, are ever succeeded by the penetrating rays of divine peace.

Closeness of man to God here below cannot be without the painful protest of man's finiteness. "With the hearing of the ear I have heard Thee," cried Job, "but now my eye seeth Thee. Therefore I reprehend myself and do penance in dust and ashes" (Job xlii. 5, 6). But immediately after his soul was flooded with golden waves of tenderness and joy, with the very perfection of confidence in that God Who had dealt so hardly with him. We are not all men of Job's simplicity and uprightness and absorption in the Divine Will; yet each of us is dealt with by God for the same end, namely, our entire sanctification, and by the same means, the strong impulses of grace provoking the responsive impulses of prayer. Has this no bearing on the devout reciting of our daily prayers? attentive spiritual reading? readiness to converse about spiritual things? good provision of prayer in preparation for the sacraments? and general recollection of life?

It is not our purpose to examine prayer that is wholly contemplative or even partly so. Yet St. Teresa tells us that many simple-minded persons say the *Pater Noster* in such spiritual wise, as to "enjoy pure contemplation without knowing it, and even to be raised to highest union with God" (*Way of Perfection*, Stanbrook, xvii., 3). But the end we have in view is to key up our reader's appreciation of the worth of fervor in ordinary devotional exercises, especially in paying our debt of penance. Joy must be religion's characteristic trait, though at intervals for God's best purpose it be obscured. "Justice and peace and

joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xiv. 17) is an inspired definition of Christianity. Christians who honestly and fervently practice daily prayer, are gradually cleansed by its penitential workings from tendencies to grave sin, and in due time safeguarded from the frequency of even deliberate venial sins.

Prayer creates Christian character. Its constant practice soothes the ruffings of an irascible temper. It also overcomes the hard influence of a rude environment. St. Athanasius knew St. Anthony after he had been in the desert wilderness alone for thirty years, and he said that this long era of solitary prayer made the great hermit anything but a rude, sullen man; it endowed him rather "with a most obliging and sociable air." Inward peace makes outward kindness. You behold the effects of prayerful habits in mingled gravity and gentleness of manner, the quick response of sympathy, the ready trustfulness of one's fellowmen—these and many other beautiful traits are seen in addition to the sublimer ones of love of God and charity to the poor.

"The prayer of faith shall save the sick man" (James v. 15). Faith depends on prayer, a fact little appreciated. When religious truth becomes a matter of devout pondering, rather than of sharp examination and discussion, argumentation yields place to preception. The *Summa* of St. Thomas is to many a vast series of dry disputations; it was Father Hecker's meditation book. Cardinal Newman found the Nicene Creed the sublimest of poems. In acute doubt about articles of faith, the soul that seeks rest in arguments casts itself on a bed of nettles. The man that measures dialectic blades with the evil one, must have a subtle mind indeed. St. Francis de Sales, the safest guide for doubting spirits, thus advises a friend: "When tempted against Catholic doctrines have a great and longsuffering courage; do not lose it for mere noise, especially in temptations against the faith. Our enemy (the devil) is a great clatterer, do not trouble yourself at all about him; he cannot hurt you. I know that well. Mock at him and let him go" (*Letters to Persons in the World*, Mackey, p. 143).

Which of us dare venture upon the spiritual hazards of a single day without watching at the gates of the Holy Spirit with morning prayer? (Prov. viii. 34.) Who dare work under the eye of God for a single day, and fail to take account of his work in the evening? Who dare spend a precious day and not reckon up its wasted hours?—except a spendthrift or a reprobate. The patriarch Isaac is praised, because he went forth into the fields, the day being now far spent, “to meditate” (Gen. xxiv. 63). “Is any of you sad,” asks the Apostle, “let him pray” (James v. 13). The solace of a bereaved heart is in silent and solitary prayer, silent acts of submission to God’s will, lonely, face to face conflict with grief. Witness Saul of Tarsus in his gloom—blind, helpless, drowned in shame. Yet God’s words about him to Ananias foretold his deliverance: “Behold he prayeth” (Acts ix. 11). An immense comfort in affliction is also found in family prayers, and the common spiritual exercises of a community.

Many complain that their prayers are not heard. This can only be true of their begging for temporal favors. These are sometimes refused because the Lord commutes the temporal blessings into spiritual ones, especially the virtues of patience and fortitude. Or again, the Lord foresees injury, for many a child is spoiled by being petted. God will not spoil His generosity by indiscriminate giving, except to His enemies. The devil prayed leave to torment Job, once, twice, thrice, and in each case his prayer was immediately granted (Job i. 11). The evil one prayed our Lord to enter into a herd of swine, and his prayer was quickly granted (Matt. viii. 31). Yet once, twice, thrice, did St. Paul beseech the Lord to deliver him from a loathsome temptation, and he was refused each time, in order that divine grace might have freer play in him, and that his spiritual life “might be made perfect in infirmity” (2 Cor. xii. 7-9).

No matter how often we are denied favors of this kind or that, the boon of eternal salvation is never denied to a soul with an established habit of prayer. Think of it, prayer is



an interview. A conference with the Almighty God, in which we beg eternal happiness of Him; and forthwith He promises to grant our petition; and bestows upon us His Holy Spirit as "the pledge of our inheritance" (Eph. i. 14). Bear in mind our Savior's reproachful words: "If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your good Father in heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him" (Luke xi. 13).

Prayer is again defined as the elevation of the soul to God: and it always brings down "the good Spirit to me"—as my Physician, Almsgiver, Savior, Food, Companion. Man is created to fly upwards into God's pure atmosphere, as a bird is made to fly in the air. Our soul's characteristic trait is aspiration by petition, for better things, to the Giver of all good gifts (James i. 17). Whosoever does not use this heavenly faculty represses it, for it must be used to keep it alive. If he says no prayer at all he is like a bird whose wings are stripped of feathers; if he prays but infrequently, his wings are clipped. "*Deo Gratias!*" was continually on St. Patrick's lips during his long missionary career, ever thanking God for His favors both sweet and bitter. It was his way, also, to say: "Thanks again!" to his people when he received any gift, or even the least attention; his habit of gratitude overflowing upon all whom he met.

No article of faith is more consoling than that love is the fulfillment of every law; and it is just as true that the form of love called gratitude is the solace of every distress of conscience. However great the debt of sin, one act of love wipes out the whole terrible score; however hopelessly insolvent I may feel afterwards, I can quiet all forebodings of God's anger by loving thanksgiving for His favors. To devout souls, thanksgiving to God is not felt to be something of their own to be given or withheld as they please; it is a return of love demanded by justice.

"If a man will give the whole substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing" (Cant. viii. 7). Love does



not huckster, it pays down the whole price demanded by the beloved, and pays it at once. We think this text applies to the commonest of all purchase prices paid by love in its barter with God for favors, namely, time—the time expended on prayer. All true Christians lavish time in devout exercises, just as gamblers lavish money in play.

We say of the man who gathers the means to pay a pressing debt, that, in his desperation, he begs, borrows, and steals the money. A really devout man greedily eyes his allotted occupations of the day; of one he begs a little space, of another he borrows fifteen minutes, of a third he steals the whole time; he is a brigand for “the prayer of God.” A man of that kind feels qualms of conscience for neglecting even a little part of his usual devotions. One who is zealous but not devout, hustles prayer and its demands out of the path of his zeal, for “he has zeal without discretion.” Have you special reasons for prayer, or powerful drawings to it? Then you must not huckster; be just, be generous, and expect marvelous results.

## XXI.

### THINK DILIGENTLY UPON HIM, OR THE PRAYER OF MEDITATION.

THE very word meditation scares many. To many it means a complicated spirituality, a signal code by which one deals with God; instead of pious thoughtfulness, it is mistaken to be the threading of a mental labyrinth, the playing of a game of mental hide and seek. Yet it is not so; it is only obedience to the Apostle's injunction: "Think diligently upon Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself; that you be not wearied, fainting in your mind" (Heb. xii. 3).

Here we have a master's definition of the holy art. When we think of divine things, not to learn, but to make ourselves love them, this is called meditating. Meditation is no other thing but an attentive thinking, voluntarily reiterated or entertained in the mind, in order to excite the will to holy and salutary affections and resolutions. It is not spoken prayer, but it is its force. What the heart of a man is to his tongue, that is mental prayer to vocal prayer.

Now, such an exercise of mind calls for method (a word to frighten laggards with), yet the venerable Father de Andreis protests against meditation degenerating into "a mere exercise of the mind." Doubtless there is solid gain in working out a scheme of reasoning about holy things, and this is meditating methodically. But suppose one's mind is fagged out; or (as often happens) one has had no early training in systematic thought of any kind; or suppose one cannot thus think from native defect? What then? Methodical treatment of devout truths is then impossible, and it is good, even necessary, freely to range about in one's memory for matter of thought, or to read a favorite book slowly, ending with some purposes of amend-

ment, or aspirations for improvement, or adoration of Christ and His Father. The weight of our pondering had best be brought practically to bear upon some particulars of our daily conduct. This go-as-you-please method St. Paul recommends: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline, think on these things" (Phil. iv. 8). Many a priest, for example, makes a good meditation worrying and praying over certain sinful parishioners, meanwhile mistaking such holy thoughts for distractions. Many parents meditate all their wakeful hours most efficaciously, mourning over dissipated sons or wayward daughters; as it is said of our Savior in the Garden: "Being in an agony, He prayed the longer" (Luke xxii. 43)—and the harder.

There are many points of view as to method. Father Thomas of Jesus, speaking of the proper spirit for reading his book on our Savior's Passion, says: "That the mind may act with more freedom, and enter with more ease into those affections to which it finds itself moved, we have not thought proper to subject it to any particular order" (*Sufferings of Jesus*, Introduction, iii.). On the other hand, St. Ignatius was an inspired master of strictly ordered meditation, and had well nigh all Christendom for his devoted pupils. Nevertheless he bids us drop our method and our points and our sequences, and instantly to follow any devout inner guidance whithersoever it may lead us.

Interior prayer transforms itself, if we may say so, into all the various phases of our minds; and its ways among men are as diverse as their multiform temperaments. There are souls who are not helped by a stated method, and some are even hindered. David, clad in King Saul's coat of mail, with his helmet of brass and his great sword, said to him: "I cannot go thus, for I am not used to it" (1 Kings xvii. 38, 39); so these undrilled spirits must go to their holy task with their shepherd's sling, and stones gathered from their soul's running brook. They are so formed by God. He leads them with sweet aspirations, or deep musings, or

direct perceptions; methods only clog their thoughts. The holy expedients of prayer must not, therefore, be mistaken for its aim and purpose, nor be made an iron rule to be riveted on every spirit. At its best, method is methodical not mechanical.

Meditation is closely related to holy reading. The latter exercise consists of reading much and thinking sometimes; the former of thinking much and reading sometimes. The sight of a familiar book is equal to the sight of God's altar to many a prayerful spirit. Holy thinking is also closely joined to holy writing, and doubles the force of mental prayer by making it a written prayer also. Mental prayer thereby becomes an exceedingly deliberate vocal prayer, the intervals all enriched with precious thoughts. We are, however, supposing that one is not writing things for himself and his good angel and God and the Holy Ghost. Newman used to say that he liked to meditate pen in hand.

We say of a crime of more than ordinary malice, that it was premeditated. Being planned *beforehand*, its wickedness was deeper. So the goodness of a good act deepens if planned *beforehand*, and the morning meditation should be premeditated over night. This makes surer the actual observance of the practice of mental prayer. "If I have remembered Thee upon my bed, I will meditate on Thee in the morning" (Ps. lxii. 7). Our divine prayer-master, the Holy Ghost, teaches us thus: divine things the last thought before sleeping, the first thought on waking. A woman making a garment first cuts a pattern out of paper; then by this pattern she cuts the cloth before sewing it into shape. So we sketch and pattern our mental prayer at night, and fit it perfectly and finally to our souls in the morning.

During sleep the ferment of the mind like yeast in a batch of dough, works to the enlargement of our thoughts. The Son of Sirach says of man that "the sleep of night changeth his knowledge" (Ecclus. xl. 5). This unearned increment of holy wisdom is always of essential value. Not seldom it has an extraordinary influence upon us, "for God," says Cassian, "sometimes

reveals in this repose of night, and as it were, sleep of the soul, mysteries which were formerly either obscure or entirely unknown." This nightly forecast of morning meditation is, perhaps, the best part of every method taught in the schools of devout living. Method indeed. If Holy Wisdom has its own method, this is the beginning of it: "He that awaketh early to seek wisdom shall not labor, for he shall find her sitting at his door" (Wisd. vi. 15). As the involuntary muscles of the human system, the heart and the intestines, do their vital work all unconsciously to us, so the faculties of the mind work out conclusions and resuscitate memories in the quiet hours of sleep.

Our Savior uses the all unnoticed fructification of plants of the field as a comparison of the unconscious growth of the inner garden of grace: "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the earth, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring, and grow up whilst he knoweth not" (Mark iv. 26, 27). He was Himself accustomed to pray in the early morning hours, bearing in His soul the living seed of the divine thoughts of the previous day: "And rising very early, going out, He went into a desert place and there He prayed. And Simon, and they that were with Him, followed after Him, and when they had found Him they said to Him: All seek for Thee" (Mark i. 35-37). All men sought Him whilst He sought His Father. This is the ideal of active beneficence. For if we seek God very early in a solitary place, then will men seek us, drawn to our solitude by God's attraction.

The good of meditation is in this: it is systematic thinking of God. Do this at set intervals, and frequently; and soon you will do it naturally and all the time. To think of divine things readily is close to entire perfection. It is a blessed truth that one can acquire this habit by ordinary assiduity. Out of strict observance of daily meditation, grows habitual advertence to God. When the elder Tobias gave his dying message (as he thought it would be) to his well-loved son, he said: "And all the days of thy life have God in thy mind" (Tob. iv. 6)—a legacy



of daily mental prayer, a legacy "more precious than gold and the topaz" (Ps. cxviii. 127).

Meditation is the soul's sincerest preaching to its dearest auditor—itsself. And until a man has expounded to himself the entire doctrine and life of Christ, he can have little hope of fully benefiting by it. The best preacher is one who starts his hearers preaching to themselves, and each of us can preach to himself by learning how to meditate.

It is not our purpose to treat elaborately of methods, for many books do that in all variety, the principal ones being the *Exercises of St. Ignatius* and the *Devout Life of St. Francis de Sales*. But as to the preliminary steps all agree that for daily meditation a stated time should be set apart; and that some short prayer should be offered up in the beginning to steady the mind and set it down to its work—avoiding overmuch ceremony. How much ceremony does a child use in going into its father's room? Scarcely any, unless it dreads a whipping; and even then very little if its father be like our heavenly Father, from Whose anger we can beg off with a few tears and a sincere promise. St. Ignatius' introductory prayer is of the briefest: "O God, may all the thoughts of my mind, all the affections of my heart, all the operations of my soul, wholly and entirely redound to the glory of Thy divine majesty" (*Spiritual Exercises*). Surely this is the geography of the inner kingdom of God, the thoughts, affections, actions of my spirit. Let Him have them and He has all. In fact meditation is the filling of my nature's soil with the seed of holy truth and love, that it may bring forth in due time the sweet fruit of steadfast loyalty to Jesus Crucified.

In meditation the soul does not consider the divine life of Jesus at random, it focuses its attention upon some particular event, some wonderful act, some lofty teaching, until the heart is made one with His in this. The result is not a general impression, but that very special one our Master had in view—exactly that and all of that. One seeks, perhaps, to be inspired with the particular graces His hearers had at the time they heard

Him, especially His Apostles; to acquire their frame of mind. Then this is bent to a practical end, to the amendment of a fault or the acquiring of a virtue which shall link us firmly to Him. Thus from the mind to the heart God's grace travels on the road of meditation. Thus, for example, from considering the First Word of Jesus from the Cross we learn to pardon enemies; or we gain inspiration for our confession from His prophecy of the last judgment. In course of time and by daily practice of this holy thinking, our Lord's influence permeates our deepest souls. By meditation the principles of religion are kept bright in our minds. In matters of policy we are wisely guided. Pure truth constantly acting on a docile spirit, clears its vision and solidifies its sincerity. The difference between one who meditates daily and one who does not is essential; it is all the difference between gravity and lightness of character in spiritual matters.

Mental prayer is a powerful aid in the holy and supreme ordeal of life's battle with temptations. "Thy words have I hidden in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee" (Ps. cxviii. 11). That I may stand my ground in time of passion's assault; silently receive a blow whether of hand or tongue, "more concerned at his fault who hurts me than at my own injury;" easily give up work when sickness disables, or obedience commands; and just as easily set to work again when these conditions change. To be apt and facile for virtue both ordinarily and on sudden occasions, nay, to be true even unto the agony of death, requires a spirit well regulated by long-continued meditation on the maxims of Christ's Gospel. Mature convictions of the good and the true precedes vigilance and valor in resisting evil.

None the less the putting of mental prayer in the daily routine of religion in a place fixed and firm, involves no small exertion of courage. St. Christopher was a man of giant frame, and he used to carry pilgrims on his shoulders across a rapid stream to a holy shrine. One stormy night a little boy came along, and asked to be carried over to worship Christ at the midnight office.

Christopher took him upon his big shoulders with a smile. But as he entered the stream with him he exclaimed: "Child, Thou art the heaviest load I ever bore, and I can scarcely endure Thy awful weight." The child answered: "Brother, hold fast of Me, do not let Me drop into the wild flood of waters." Christopher braced himself up and exerted his vast strength to the utmost, until he landed his small but strangely heavy burden in safety. As the child's feet touched the ground, He began to shine with heavenly lustre. Christopher sank upon his knees all amazed and troubled. Then the Boy reached up and put His arms around the big man's neck, and kissed him lovingly, saying: "Brother, thou shalt be called Christopher from henceforth, for thou hast carried Christ Himself, and He thanks thee for thy perseverance in the angry waves of the stream." So shall I win Christ's blessing if I bear Him through life's stormy waves in my heart's dearest thought. The grace of perseverance is given to steadfastness in daily meditation: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Apoc. ii. 10).

How sure am I of passing an innocent day if God's words attend me amid the silence of dawn, if they speak to me forenoon, afternoon, and evening, until I hearken again before retiring to new voices from above in making my plan of the next day's meditation. What downright guiltiness of act is there, which is not due to some vein of guilty thoughtlessness? Mental prayer forefends this by holy thoughtfulness. The least acquaintance with life shows that its evils are best explained by men's want of thought. From miserable moral mediocrity down to utter depravity of life, our woe is due to want of serious reflection on things eternal. "With desolation is all the land made desolate; because there is none that considereth in the heart" (Jer. xii. 11). The great realities of life are not really known as such: "Justice, chastity, and the judgment to come" (Acts xxiv. 25). We sin because our eternally established relations to the Supreme Being are but transiently considered, and "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the charity of God, and the communication of

the Holy Ghost" (2 Cor. xiii. 13) are upon men's lips as the prattle of unthinking children. "Believe me," says St. Francis de Sales, "it is only taste which fails you, not sight: you see, but without satisfaction; you chew bread, but as if it were tow, without taste or relish" (*Letters to Persons in the World*, Mackey, p. 240). Christians do not penetrate to the meaning of their faith because they make no mental effort to do so. Those who are called to save men's souls are failures for the same reason. They live in the delusion that one can serve men better by work than by prayer. The contrary is the truth. The man who prays well, works well. If my work is above my ability I can level up to it by daily meditation, because I can always pray well. The essential element of success in prayer is good will and that alone, a quality cheap and abundant in every Christian soul. We must bear in mind that mental prayer is mainly a preparation; it is a means admirably calculated to induce a state of mind spontaneously prayerful. St. Bridget says that "Meditation is the needle that should draw after it the golden thread of devout aspirations." The prophet exclaims: "We are filled in the morning with Thy mercy, and we have rejoiced, and are delighted all our days" (Ps. lxxxix. 14). The overflowing plenty of the morning's pious thoughts fills the emptiness of the whole day, whose "wilderness shall rejoice, and shall flourish like the lily" (Is. xxxv. 1).

Meditation thus generates recollection. A recollected soul is one whose ordinary state of mind is advertence to God. However his mind may be occupied, it is always preoccupied with the things of God. Now meditation, devoutly practised, provides the material for this frame of mind. The scenes of our Savior's Passion move across our mental vision; the maxims of His Gospel echo through the soul's atmosphere of love; the resolutions of a good life are registered over and over again; vice becomes more odious, and virtue more and more attractive. It is like the resonance of sweet chimes which fills the air with melody long after the stroke of the bell itself. St. Paul of the

Cross used often to ask his disciples pleasantly: "Well, how are you getting on at home?" After a while they found out what the Saint meant—how are you enjoying the presence of God in your soul. Meditation in the morning peoples our interior home with God and His angels throughout the day.

No man is fit to deal with other men who has not learned how to deal with God in silence and solitude. In private prayer God reveals to us His all-sufficiency, and makes good His exclusive claim upon us, and upon those to whom we are to impart Him. God does not want works of zeal except they be done with purity of motive by men wholly disinterested, and actuated entirely by love for Him. Nor does He will us to save our fellowmen to the prejudice of our own spiritual advancement.

The offering of our thoughts to God is the most difficult of all our oblations, because they are the least under our control. Once, however, we are able to rule them, even with partial discipline, all else is easy in a life of immolation, for thought precedes all action. God prompts them by His loving inspirations, if we but present our minds before Him. He draws us to virtue by irresistible attractions; this is the favorite work of the Holy Ghost. To spend a holy half hour in marshalling our mental forces before God, is to obey His injunction to the ancient patriarch: "Walk before Me and be perfect" (Gen. xvii. 1). He that walks interiorly before the eye of God may be trusted to walk openly before men, doing good at every step. Would that I were as conscious of God as I am of men! In rivalry of God men say: "Walk before us and be perfect." God would force me into His presence and I will not go. Yet often enough when men would rather not have me among them, I force myself upon them.



## XXII.

### SPIRITUAL READING.

PART of Ezechiel's commission as a prophet was to eat the written words of his prophecy. "And He said to me: Son of man, eat this book, and go speak to the children of Israel. And I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that book. And He said to me: Son of man thy belly shall eat and thy bowels shall be filled. And I did eat it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth. And He said to me: Son of man, go to the house of Israel, and thou shalt speak My words to them" (Ezech. iii. 1-4). It shall not be otherwise with any energetic servant of God. Whether for self-discipline or the saving of his neighbor, the Holy Scriptures, and all other devout books, must be eaten and drunk and assimilated into our soul's very substance before we can rightly play our part in life. As to self-discipline, spiritual reading, when it forms part of one's daily routine, has a most elevating influence. It so refines our nature that temptations are easily rejected, and our passions are effectually tamed. In addition to the ordinary feelings of faith, of hope, of love, and of sorrow for sin, we gain a deep insight into the principles, the reasons, the inspirations, the heroes, of these virtues.

In some ancient Benedictine monasteries, it was customary that each novice at his entrance should present the community with one or two books. These were the substitute for a dower of money, it would seem; and for so enlightened a career as that of a servitor of holy wisdom, what gift to his brethren could be more appropriate than a good book? The great Abbot Thrithemius gave out as a maxim: "The neglect of study and the breakdown of discipline ever go hand in hand." Holy study and holy living are the weft and woof of the tapestry of life. The history of

Christ and of His saints should be made to us both a perpetual joy and a stimulating reproach. What ails us that ten minutes reading about Christ and His heroes tires us out, and hours and hours of reading inconsequent stuff entertains us highly? Blessed is the man who can say that at the day of judgment he will stake his fate on the kind of reading that best pleased him during his life.

Thomas à Kempis adopted as a motto: "I sought for rest, but found it not, save in a little corner with a little book." What he found he gave forth. His own "little book" was the New Testament, and reading it in a quiet cell, or within a shady nook among the trees, he learned how to write his *Imitation*. Many an hour of heavenly rest has he furnished us by that "little book."\* A daily custom of good reading is like prayer. It may be left in God's hands for a future—often a very near future—of advancement in virtue. Speaking of so practical a love of holy wisdom, the Wise Man says: "Come to her as one that plougheth, and soweth, and wait for her good fruits" (Ecclus. vi. 19).

St. Philip Neri says that perfection is a life of toil. Toiling at what tasks? Intellectual and moral tasks of the greatest interest, reading and studying and resolving and acting in the ways and wisdom of the Most High. His biographer, Bacci, tells us that when St. Philip came to the last day of his life, which he knew well and had foretold, he spent the hours in saying farewell to his closest friends, and in listening to the lives of the saints, especially that of St. Bernardine of Siena, "which he caused to be read over to him a second time." St. Teresa said: "I am always wishing I had time for reading, for I have ever been fond of it. But I read very little, for when I take up a book I become recollected through the pleasure it gives me, and thus my reading is turned into prayer" (*Relations* i., 7). Herein is a solution of

\*The late George Ripley, in his day one of our foremost literary critics, being hard pressed by debt, sold his library. As he saw the books he loved so dearly being carted off, he said: "I can now understand how a man would feel if he could attend his own funeral."

the problem of distractions in meditation, as well as of that painful vacancy of mind so common to busy mortals when they strive to pray. Listen to another master in spiritual lore: "Use books when you find your soul weary; that is to say, read a little and then meditate, then again read a little and meditate, till the end of your half hour. Mother (St.) Teresa thus acted in the beginning, and said that she found it a very good plan for herself. And since we are speaking in confidence, I will add that I also have tried it myself and found it good for me" (*St. Francis de Sales, Letters to Persons in Religion*, Mackey, Lett. ix.).

No mental prayer is better, none is easier, than reading divine truth in a leisurely, thoughtful frame of mind. Are you troubled by distractions in vocal prayer? Substitute the reading of the Psalms or of the Book of Job, or of our Savior's sayings and doings in the Gospels, or St. Paul's Epistles. The eye is thus enlisted in the work of prayer, and the holy questioning of the mind is stimulated, double interest is aroused, relieving the monotony of the recitation of words. The writings of all approved authors contain God's teaching, and their reading is at once the joy and the guidance of intelligent Catholics. St. Augustine says, that when we pray we speak to God, and when we read a religious book, God speaks to us.

"And take unto you. . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. vi. 17). The word of God here named by the Apostle is primarily the instruction of the pastors of God's Church. But it includes the Holy Scriptures, especially those of the New Testament, the reading of which is a principal means of enlightening our souls unto salvation (2 Tim. iii. 16). Hence our Holy Father, the Pope, has bestowed an indulgence on all who devoutly read the Gospels of Christ, whether in the official Latin version or in any authorized translation. "God's words are deeds" is an expression of a saint, referring to words spoken in the soul during the higher states of contemplation. But the saying is true of God's words in Holy Scripture, spoken as they are through His inspired writers, for they work a work upon us so strong, so

sweet, so enduring, that their force often equals that of the divine locutions of a saint's ecstasy.

Thus is meditation fed by reading; and the same words might be used in the reverse order, for reading is most fruitful of virtue when it is fed by meditation. Book in hand does it happen that our souls grow warm with sympathy for Christ Crucified, or with zeal for His lost sheep: "My heart grew hot within me; and in my meditation a fire shall flame out" (Ps. xxxviii. 4). Prayer and the sacraments will lead us to read that we may hold fast to the good which they produce; that such good may be deepened and increased in our souls. Each virtue as practised has a literature which tells of its extension, amplification, development, illustration. By reading we learn its history, praise, defence; we are warned against its counterfeits, we are instructed in its dogmas. And conversely, whatever good and true thing we read, breeds thoughts that are prayers, or that are resolves of a practical kind, or pictures for the memory, or discipline for unruly tendencies.

St. Hugh of Grenoble, during whose episcopate and in whose diocese St. Bruno founded the Carthusians, wept tears of emotion whenever he heard the Scriptures read. And no part of them is so fruitful of useful lessons as the history of our Lord's Passion. In early days this love of the Scriptures was a prominent trait of Christians, and it won many a martyr his crown. In Diocletian's persecution there was one named Emeritus, who, while undergoing torture, was interrogated by the pagan judge: "Have you any Scriptures in your house?" He answered: "I have some; but I also have them in my heart." But the judge repeated his question, wishing to get the holy books to burn them publicly; and the martyr never changed his answer: "I have them in my heart." And thus he suffered martyrdom, according to the prophet's boast to the Most High: "Thy words have I hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Ps. cxvii. 11).

"Philip said to Him: Lord show us the Father, and it is enough for us" (John xiv. 8). This petition was the longing of

a contemplative spirit for the unveiled vision of God. Our Redeemer's answer is the practical method of all prayer, even of the highest contemplation: "Philip, he that seeth Me, seeth the Father also." Now the pages of the Gospel are as it were the Beloved's lattices: "Behold He standeth behind our wall, looking through the windows, looking through the lattices" (Cant. ii. 9). Through those inspired pages He darts the glances of His eager love, those fleeting glimpses of the Deity which are all that we may hope for now, and which, in very truth, are all that we can now endure.

"If thou shalt seek wisdom as money, and shall dig for her as for a treasure, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and shalt find the knowledge of God" (Prov. ii. 4, 5). From some writings you dig ore, and then you must smelt it by set meditations; that makes the treasure more intimately your own. Out of other books you get some ore and some virgin metal ready smelted by the authors; and these are very delightful books. Out of others, again, you get money ready made—the ore dug, smelted, stamped and delivered to you in current coin of God's realm of truth and love. Holy Scripture contains all these treasure troves by turns. But one must always do some digging—even the minted coin of holy wisdom is hidden treasure to millions of careless spirits. Do you want a watchword for Scripture reading? It is dig! dig! dig! "If thou shalt seek wisdom," says the Sage, "as money, and shalt dig for her as for a treasure, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and shalt find the knowledge of God" (Prov. ii. 4, 5). A fondness for God's written word is like the prospector's zeal for finding rich diggings in the gold-mining regions of the west.

St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, met St. Ignatius of Antioch on his way to Rome to be martyred, and he reverently kissed his chains. Afterwards St. Polycarp himself was crowned a martyr. So we, by reading of the martyrs, kiss their chains in spirit and receive their benediction, and thus we are ourselves made martyrs, at least in holy envy. It is a unique honor paid to the lives of the



saints, that from the earliest days of Christianity our forefathers publicly read the acts of the martyrs during divine service, especially on the anniversaries of their triumph. Apart from Holy Scripture this was the only liturgical reading of the early Church. In reading such books as Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, what a wealth of virtue is there found on deposit as in a bank, from which we draw out and which we spend in every practice of faith and hope and love. Annuities and daily doles; food and drink; rich garments; all the soul's heavenly furniture are there, especially the imitation of Christ, which is the bequest of God's blessed martyrs.

One should read the lives of the saints so constantly as to live a life apart with them and among them. Our usual environment is men like ourselves, of imperfect spirit and abounding in faults. But the true Christian should at close intervals be back and forth with Christ's discipleship of perfect souls, whereby the virtues of our Master and His maxims shall form our familiar atmosphere. The saints should be our only heroes. Why read of men's warlike deeds, when these champions of the Prince of Peace are given us for our models? "They were stoned, they were cut asunder, they were tempted, they were put to death by the sword..... being in want, distressed, afflicted; of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb. xi. 37, 38). Great from statecraft? No, but from holy simplicity. Great by the might of their swords? No, but from undaunted endurance of the swords of tyrants for God's true faith.

It is related of St. Ignatius, in the earlier period of his saint-hood, that he and two or three devout companions journeyed through Spain teaching the little catechism, going always on foot, and carrying each his own pack on his back. An ignorant but kindly-disposed peasant joined them once, happening to be bound in the same direction. Edified by their cheerful and pious ways, he now and then induced them to let him carry their packs. When they came to an inn he saw them each retire to a quiet corner apart, kneel down and meditate for some notable time.

Struck by their example he did the same. A bystander asked him what he was doing. He answered: "I do nothing else but this; I say to God, Lord, these men are saints, and I have been glad to be their beast of burden. And what they do, I wish also to do." It afterwards turned out that this rude clown became a very spiritual man.

Many a thing in the lives of the saints we cannot understand. But we can understand at least their virtues of the more common kind, and these we can practise because we see them done by God's saints. "Be ye imitators of me," says the Apostle, "as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. iv. 16). "Giving thanks, with joy, to God the Father, Who hath made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light" (Col. i. 12).

All really devout souls have some stated time for daily spiritual reading. Spiritual reading holds rank second only to the sacraments and to prayer in every plan of a perfect Christian life. Give some part of the day to such reading if it be no more than fifteen minutes; and you will soon experience a wonderful deepening of religious motives. Take the time before breakfast, for instance, rising just a little earlier for the purpose, or some other part of the day that you may claim for private use. Let not your first daily mental occupation be the newspapers, reading things that you intend to forget, but rather the reading of the things of God and of paradise, whose sweetness and glory are eternal.

It is well to keep more than one book for daily use, if only to have the advantage of variety: as a portion of the Old Testament and a portion of the New; something from the lives of the saints; a few pages from a book on ascetical doctrine. A daily choice of two, even three, from a list embracing half a dozen volumes is a good plan; experience proves that it makes the devout task easier.

Another help is the custom of making short notes and copying out selections, whether for use in prayer or as an aid to memory. Remember that when you learned to read you learned to write. As these two endowments came together, so should they

continue working together. Jot down any thought that particularly pleases you. Of matter that is not worth writing down read little; and this may be said of nearly the entire bulk of the daily papers, especially the Sunday editions. What is not worth writing down is hardly worth reading.\* It is thus that "wise men lay up knowledge" (Prov. x. 14). The Son of Sirach says that the wise man "will keep the sayings of renowned men" (Ecclus. xxxix. 1)—*keep* them close at hand; write down their gems of wisdom; learn portions of them by heart.

Acquiring spiritual doctrine is not learning a science, even a spiritual one. It is rather like learning how to paint pictures, an accomplishment gained by constant repetitions, which gradually develop taste and appreciation in equal step with manual dexterity. So it is by spiritual taste and appreciation (*sapere*), rather than by understanding, that one benefits by the study of divine literature. It is not truth that we seek in this exercise, but the beauty of truth. As a novice to the pictorial art copies masterpieces over and over again, so does a novice to the art of holy living make of his memory a veritable picture gallery, filled with his own copies of the events of Christ's life, and of the lives of those of His saints for whom he has a special attraction.

Here are some tests for guidance in choosing a book for constant use: I have read this book, and I wish I had it new to read over again so as to enjoy the charm of novelty. I wish I had read it years ago. I wish I could stand examination in it. I wish I had it by heart. This book is too short—yet all too long for my keeping its instructions. Here is a book I will give to the friend I love best. O what an immense grace to be able to write a book like this!

"As ideas occurred to him, he wrote them down on slips of paper, and when the meeting drew near, after weighing every thought, scrutinizing every sentence, and pondering every word, he fused them together into a connected whole." This was the method of Lincoln as described by the historian Rhodes.

## XXIII.

### THE PILLAR OF CLOUD, OR SENSIBLE DEVOTION.

It was God's primal purpose to take His "delights..... with the children of men" (Prov. vii. 31). Frustrated of His purpose by our first parents' abuse of this privilege, He yet grants us a divine relish in our exiled state by interior communications of love. A great authority affirms that this interior joy is often more than enough to compensate for the loss of the earthly paradise (Thomas of Jesus, *Sufferings of Christ*, ix., 7). He sometimes reveals His goodness so vividly as to set men on fire with longings for Him and Him alone. We do not refer to the ecstasies of the saints, but the ordinary jubilations of generous souls. The pains of this life are made sweet and its pleasures bitter by the constant recurrence of what is known as sensible devotion of the more refined sort. The Lord goes before His pilgrims "to show the way by day in a pillar of cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire; that He might be the guide of their journey at both times" (Exod. xiii. 21), so that He is a gift of peace in trouble and of thanksgiving in joy.

St. Justin the Martyr declared to his pagan friends, that he learned to believe in Christ from observing the cheerful faces of Christian martyrs amid their awful sufferings. He was proficient in philosophy, but the truths shining in the pages of Plato were eclipsed by the brightness of Christian faith shining in the faces of men dying for Christ's sake. It was Justin's privilege to feel and exhibit that terrible joy himself, when in due time he suffered martyrdom. So had it been with St. Paul: "Gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may dwell in me. For which cause I please myself in my infirmi-

ties, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ. For when I am weak, then am I powerful" (2 Cor. xii. 9, 10).

This joyous atmosphere of devotion is not to be mistaken for mere emotion. It is fervor, it is intensity of purpose, and it is enthusiasm. It is that earnestness which made the saints pray like the Psalmist: "I cried with my whole heart, hear me, O Lord" (Ps. cxviii. 145). On occasions they are almost beside themselves—their prayer seems to others a panic and their zeal fanaticism. So we must say with St. Teresa, that devotional feeling "does not consist in a great sweetness of devotion, but in a more fervent wish to please God in all things, in avoiding as much as we possibly can, all that would offend Him, and in praying for the increase of the glory and honor of His Son and for the growth of the Catholic Church" (*Interior Castle*, IV. Mansions, ch. i.).

Rest in labor, solace in trouble, hope in despondency—all these sweet comforts are granted by a realizing sense of God's goodness in His past dealings with our poor race, a feeling experienced by the memories and the appreciations set going in meditation: "I remembered, O Lord, Thy judgments of old: and I was comforted" (Ps. cxviii. 52). Even the material circumstances of devout practices become fragrant with holy joy. St. Bede, when just about to depart this life, said: "Hold my head so that I may have the joy of looking towards my little oratory where I used to pray." Thus placed, his dying eyes fixed upon the scene of many hours of peaceful prayer, he bade his attendants sing the *Gloria Patri*; when they came to the end and chanted the Holy Spirit's name, the saintly monk expired.

Devotional sweetness has its perils; but this it does: it sickens us of the joys of our fleshly appetites. We may go to excess in our joyous imaginings about God and heaven, and thereby practice spiritual gluttony. But this will at any rate tend to cure us of every kind of bodily self-indulgence. Sensible devotion is often a form of sentimentalism, but a spiritual form, and it cures us of the sentimentalism of human love, and reveals



the delusions of worldly pleasure. It is this interior happiness that the Apostle prayed God to grant his converts: "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened by His Spirit, with might unto the inward man" (Eph. iii. 16).

The dangers already referred to lie in the human admixture; principally from thinking of the good works we perform (we are interpreting St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, IV. Mansions, ch. i.), and the diligence we give to prayer and meditation. "On consideration," says the Saint to her nuns, "we shall find that many temporal matters give us the same pleasure—such as unexpectedly coming into a large fortune, suddenly meeting with a dearly loved friend, or succeeding in any affair that makes a noise in the world. Again it would be felt by one who had been told her husband, brother or son was dead, and who saw him return to her alive. I have seen people weep with such joy, as I have done myself. I consider these joys and the ones we feel in religious matters to be both natural ones. But the spiritual ones spring from a more noble source—they in short begin indeed in ourselves, but they end in God. But what I have called spiritual consolations are far different. They on the contrary arise from God, and our nature feels them and rejoices in them as keenly, and indeed far more keenly, than men do in earthly riches."

Seeking for God here below is, indeed, a pilgrimage of sadness, for our tendencies are those of a corrupted nature, and our journey is beset with many dangers. Yet the same Lord Who placed His pillar of fire by night and of cloud by day to guide His children in their desert wanderings, never fails to do the same with us, so that we may say with the Psalmist: "Thy justifications were the subject of my song, in the place of my pilgrimage" (Ps. cxviii. 54).

A graphic picture of a mind quite overflowing with spiritual joy is St. Augustine's account of his feelings in the first fervor of his conversion: "I could not enjoy enough during those days the surpassing joy of musing upon the depths of Thy wisdom in

the salvation of the human race. What tears did I shed over the hymns and canticles, when the sweet sound of the music of Thy Church thrilled my soul. As the music flowed into my ears, and Thy truth trickled into my heart, the tide of devotion swelled high within me, and the tears ran down and there was gladness in those tears" (*Confessions*, Book IX., ch. vi.).

This was a sort of holy inebriation, felt by a mighty soul as he heard the welcome of the angels on his entrance into that heavenly society, God's Church, of which the Lord had said: "Behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and the people thereof joy" (Is. lxxv. 18). What company is so happy as a family of pious Catholics, what silence is so sweetly soothing as the *magnum silentium* of a religious community, or the peaceful days and nights of a retreat.

Yet we distinguish between the sensible influence of grace, felt in joy, or fervor, or holy awe, and the actual spur to good works—between the aroma of the fruit and its nourishing substance. God bestows joy very often without our coöperation; it is not so with acts of virtue. These need our good will. This is a distinction of much importance, seldom duly considered or even known, especially by beginners. When both sentiment and act are inextricably combined, the ideal condition is reached. St. Augustine in that same wonderful book of *Confessions*, says that while he was preparing to be baptized, "I read the Psalms with my soul on fire;" and in the same chapter he speaks of earnest characters as men who read or speak "with their heart in their eyes" (Book IX., ch. iv.).

A man is famishing of hunger and thirst. Offer him only food to eat, even the most delicious, and he perishes with it in his mouth. He cannot swallow; the moisture of his body is dried up. A few mouthfuls of water, and all is changed; he now eats because he has drunk, and he now can masticate and swallow his food. So it is with sensible devotion. It is the moisture of our spiritual nourishment. Some amount of it is a necessary help to both praying and working for God. Can anyone love without

feeling that he loves? Is love mere intellectuality? Is it blank volition? Therefore to pray at times for tenderness of sentiment, awesome reverence, exhilaration of courage is as much a duty as it is a necessity. There are seasons when "the mind feels as if it had never thought of God, nor ever would be able to do so in the future. When men speak of Him they seem to be talking of someone far away" (St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, VI. Mansions, ch. i., 17).

Shall not one pray for fervor rather even than for virtue, when all virtue seems impossible, interest in spiritual things or books is vanished, when a sermon is to the soul what sawdust is to the mouth, and things that once generated love of God and zeal for one's neighbor, now leave the soul cold as ice?

Sensible devotion is usually, and often exclusively, taken to mean the sweetness that is incident to God's service, especially in prayer. Yet not sweetness but bitterness is the most precious devotional sentiment, the overflowing of our emotional nature during moments of regret for sin—into tears and sighs, horror and pain. Sensible bitterness of contrition is, for most of our moods, a far higher gift of God than the sensible sweetness of affection towards Him. The Council of Trent places the essence of effectual repentance in "pain of soul and detestation of past sin" (sess. xiv., ch. iv.), surely a bitter state of mind, and yet the most desirable of all devotional feelings. The gladness of holy faith and hope and love let us receive with a welcome; the sadness of grief for sin let us receive with a double welcome. A shade of suspicion hangs over all joy in this life, even religious joy, for we are in a state of banishment and atonement. That shade vanishes and joy becomes immune from suspicion, only when its happy thrills are received with reserve, and we welcome it with the sign of the cross. "My brethren," exclaims the Apostle, "count it all joy when you shall fall into divers temptations" (James i. 2). What a strange joy is this! Surely we must readjust our views of joy and sorrow. Surely it takes a stalwart character to be a true Christian.

Make hay while the sun shines—a maxim whose wisdom is best known in a rainy climate. So with souls of a gloomy temperament, or those whose lives are saddened by constant suffering. These often outstrip their sunnier brethren in the race of perfection, because adversity is a supreme test of friendship whether for God or man. "A friend shall not be known in prosperity" (Ecclus. xii. 8). In aridity we show God our truest love, particularly if we continue faithful to our regular devotional exercises.

To change the figure: In midsummer we come upon beds of streams dry and rocky; these are not fed by springs but by the rain. They are torrents amid downpouring rain, and furnish water when water is plenty without them. So of a certain sort of devotional feeling—its source is not the perennial spring of religious principle but the showers, perhaps thunderstorms, of religious emotionalism.

All sensible sweetness in prayer, beyond merely appreciative feelings, is to be accepted with calmness, enjoyed with moderation, and surrendered with gladness. And if it roll and surge in the heart with overmastering force, it is even to be suspected of diabolical origin. Sensible devotion should be treated with that rational hospitality, which welcomes the coming, and speeds the parting guest. It is true that it always makes prayer easier. But does it make virtue easier? After prayer is over and done, does the force of love reach higher results as a consequence of devout feelings? As a rule it does not. One comes from semi-ecstasy in prayer and presently loses control of his temper—he is quite the same man as before. He meditates on our dying Savior's thirst with tearful sympathy, and at the next meal he is powerless to restrain his appetite for dainties—just as before. Plain reasoning in meditation with incandescent fervor, is a better ideal than the pulsations of a high spiritual temperature, which sometimes knock out of one's head the simple duty of the hour. "And as soon as she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for joy, but running in she told that Peter stood before the gate"



(Acts xii. 14). Thus did joy hinder the damsel Rhode from duty's task, as it has hindered not a few others ever since.

Magdalen, on the contrary, saw angels at the sepulchre, a vision of heavenly beauty, beings whose conversation was a divine rapture; but she did not delay with them, but ran off to Peter and John crying out: "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him" (John xx. 2). Jesus and not angels was her quest. So in prayer, sweetness of feeling is not our quest, but solid conviction of duty, honest payment of allegiance to God and affection to men, strong resolves of a practical kind: not angels but God, not joy but virtue.

One day St. Teresa, glowing with divine love, not knowing how to give expression to her feelings, snatched up a broom and began sweeping. Thus does the wisdom of a saint chasten the joys of heavenly visitations with earthly tasks of humility.

The consolations of a devout life should not savor of ordinary feelings of self-content. We seek even in pious exercises the comforts of mind craved by unregenerate nature. "Thou hast found honey, eat what is sufficient for thee, lest being glutted therewith thou vomit it up" (Prov. xxv. 16). In childhood we prefer the sweet things of a meal to the substantial food. Now it happens that in the spiritual life we, for the most part, continue to be children to the end—even unto old age we glut ourselves with the sweetness of prayerful feelings, instead of nourishing our souls with the strong but tasteless food of kindness, patience, and humility. Sensible, practical resolves for the day's work and suffering, dependent wholly on the deep flowing realizations of divine things, let these be our aim. As to sensible devotion the question ever demands answer: Are these feelings the fruit of religious conviction, or of religious enthusiasm? Are we depending on taste, or on reason and grace? Too often we fall under the Psalmist's admonition: "In the evening weeping shall have place, and in the morning gladness. And in my abundance I said: I shall never be moved" (Ps. xxix. 6, 7).



Not seldom the life of a devout soul is a succession of fat days and lean days, spiritual gluttony and spiritual starvation, excessive sadness alternating with extravagant joy. St. Philip Neri taught that spiritual despondency has no other source than pride, and he knew men's hearts well. He distinguished three sorts of vainglory in a religious man: "The first he called the mistress, which is when vainglory arises in the mind beforehand, and is the motive and seed of the action. The second he called the companion; this is when a man does not perform an action for the sake of vainglory, but feels a complacency in doing it. The third he called the slave; and this is when vainglory rises in the performance of a good deed, and is put down the moment it rises. And he used to add: 'Take care at least that it be not mistress; and though as a companion it does not take away the merit of a good action, yet perfection consists in having it a slave!' Lastly, he used to quote St. Bernard, that to arrive at the perfection of humility, four things are necessary—to despise the world, to despise no person, to despise self, to despise being despised by others" (Bacci, English Edition).

God sometimes takes His consolations away from us, but His mercy ever remains. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a moment of indignation have I hid My face a little while from thee, but with everlasting kindness have I had mercy on thee" (Is. liv. 7, 8). The rainbow is to be admired as a beautiful token of God's love, rather than worshipped as something god-like.

We readily forget that this life is a vale of tears, and its brightness, not that of an ever unclouded sky, but rather the occasional gleams of sunshine between the showers of an incurably bad climate. "The heaven of heavens is the Lord's: but the earth He hath given to the children of men" (Ps. cxiii. 16). Let us who are of the earth be content with the earth; it is God's gift and it is good. Heaven with God will be ours in due time; the earth with God is our present destiny. Later on we shall rejoice as the angels do, but now we are but men and our

joy is of the earth, that of wayfarers in a land of exile, a joy of patience, a joy even of tears. But how holy is our sorrow and how powerful an instrument of God's providence, since it uncovers the deeper springs of eternal joy. Therefore "is any of you sad? Let him pray. Is he cheerful in mind? Let him sing" (James v. 13).

God sends upon your soul the south wind and sunshine and warmth, with the flowers and fruits of devotional feelings. Praise Him with joy and thank Him with alleluias. But the same God sends the chill of winter, scanty sunlight, weeping skies. Praise Him with fear and thank Him with sadness. "Cold cometh out of the north, and to God praise with fear" (Job xxxvii. 22). Whatever changes He causes in the weather without or our feelings within, there is no change in Himself. He is always equally worthy of love, sometimes joyful love, sometimes fearful—always love with thanksgiving. Praise God for a cold heart, for if it means a dreary winter it will be followed by a genial summer.

Beethoven composed several of his greatest pieces long after total deafness had rendered him incapable of hearing a single note of music. His soul was so sensitive to musical beauty, and so ready and sure in its choice of harmonies, that the dim memory of sound was sufficient guidance to his genius. So should our faith be ready and sure in trusting God in dark days; and in brighter times we should be not unprepared for the inevitable return of the clouds. "In the day of good things be not unmindful of evils: and in the day of evils be not unmindful of good things" (Ecclus. xi. 27).

What do farmers do in time of drought? They pray for rain; but they are not content with that. In the arid sections of America what is called dry farming has been extensively tried and with wonderful success in utilizing a rate of rainfall too little for a crop with ordinary cultivation; but it is ample moisture for one with the new method. According to this the farmer plows deeper, plows oftener, harrows oftener, pulverizes the soil

to cover up the deeper layers against evaporation. It costs more money than the old way, but it brings better harvests, not seldom forty bushels of wheat to the acre. So in time of spiritual drought (aridity is an established name for the lack of sensible feeling in religion) one goes deeper into God for his motives, he has a keener anxiety about petty faults, yea, even the most trifling, and he pulverizes vainglory.

Father de Andreis, a Vincentian missionary in the Western States early in the last century (for whose canonization preparations are now being made), left the following memorandum: "I beg the divine goodness to give me instead of sensible sweetness of devotion, an increase of light, so that I may know what I should do, and of strength to execute God's will always in view of Himself alone" (*Life*, ch. x.). Those who complain of distractions in prayer would do well to try the making of such acts of detachment and humility as a mode of relief, the easiest method of deep spiritual plowing and the most efficacious. A man will spend hour upon hour steadfastly attentive to thoughts about someone who has insulted him. His *quis*, *quid*, *ubi*, *quare*, *quomodo*, *quando*—who is he, what right had he, how cunningly he chose his time and place to down me—all fully developed and illustrated, intensified with colloquies, sharp pointed with resolutions; all done without an effort. Why can he not give as much attention to Jesus Crucified?

Meanwhile it is a comfort to know that blameless indevotion is the equivalent of joyful devotion. "If," says St. Teresa, "you are not to blame for dryness of mind in prayer, the Lord is just; what He refuses you in one way His majesty will give you in another, as He knows how" (*Interior Castle*, III. Mansions, ch. ii.). The Lord's exchanges are always balanced in our favor. In place of fleeting consolations He gives enduring virtue.

Shall we pray for sensible devotion? Most assuredly yes. It enables us to meditate oftener and longer, to recall our good purposes in an atmosphere of joy. "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit"

(Ps. l. 14). But shall we petition for ecstasies in prayer? Most assuredly no. Yet the saints bid us ask of God some humble share of the higher graces of contemplation just as we ask for heaven itself. Ejaculatory prayer has here a perpetual utility. St. Bernard says of St. Malachy that his heart was like a bow always bent, and continually shooting short prayers up to heaven. Let us bear in mind the Lord's teaching, that though importunity plagues men it pleases God (Luke xi. 7).

Our Lord says in the Apocalypse: "Behold I stand at the gate and knock. If any man shall hear My voice, and open to Me the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Apoc. iii. 20). Aye, Lord—I can answer—I bid Thee come in; but the door of my heart I cannot open, for it is locked on the outside by my carnal nature. Thou alone hast the key—unlock my heart from the outside, enter in and we shall feast together, and "let my soul be filled as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips" (Ps. lxii. 6).

A lesson from the resurrection morn. Magdalen persevered seeking Jesus, though the empty tomb baffled her. She sought Him dead and found Him living because she continued resolutely on in her search. What a burst of light and love when at last He said: "Mary!" and she answered, "Rabboni! (which is to say, Master)" (John xx. 16). So we, if we are as persistent in seeking Him in gloom as in sunshine, shall finally find Him. Mostly Jesus is disguised in one form or other because it is in faithful seeking that our love is tested by faith and strengthened by hope. Like Mary, we too shall seek Him dead and find Him living; indeed there is no other kind of seeking and finding Jesus. And it is from that kind of meeting that we receive our mission for leading others to Jesus: "Go, tell My disciples," He said to Mary.

This is true, also, of our Lord's seeking after us, for we are constantly avoiding and evading Him. Therefore does St. Augustine say: "If God sought me when I fled from Him, how can He fly from me when I seek Him?"

We have not touched upon the mysterious desolation of spirit experienced by the saints, which generates what is known as disinterested love of God. To love God, hell or no hell, heaven or no heaven—let none of us venture on this perilous and heroic spirituality, nor so much as ask for such a trial. *Strictly* disinterested love is not compatible with truth, nor even in a modified form is it any thing to be longer after. A certain class of souls experience it as a fiery visitation of the Holy Spirit, souls far above our own class.

Yet in a devout fancy we can profit by certain yearnings after God, mentally prescinding though not totally ignoring heaven or hell as motives of our love. Bishop Camus tells us that St. Francis de Sales was fond of quoting the following incident from Joinville's *Life of St. Louis*. A certain holy woman presented herself before one of the king's chaplains, bearing in one hand a lighted torch, and in the other a pitcher of water filled to the brim. "What are you going to do?" she was asked. And she answered: "With this torch I am going to burn up Paradise, and with this water I am going to put out the fire of hell, in order that henceforth God may be served with disinterested love." St. Francis then explained that such love was so noble that it served God from no mercenary spirit; not from fear of punishment or hope of reward. He added that he wished that story to be told on all possible occasions (*Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, p. 64).



## XXIV.

### THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

THE power of the saints with God is that familiar right of ownership which belongs to children in their father's house. Now this right is also ours. If they are children at home, we are children homeward bound. The common ownership of all of God's good things is the bond of our family union, and it offers our heavenly brethren the ever-recurring opportunity of bestowing favors upon us. Their virtues are as truly gifts to them from our common Father as our necessities are our unimpeachable credentials for demanding our share—our share of their spiritual wealth and also of loving union with themselves. "All things are yours," says the Apostle to us, "whether it be Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world, or life or death, or things present or things to come; for all are yours, and you are Christ's and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. iii. 22, 23). What a charter of heavenly ownership! What a holy service does it not engender in our souls! How high a prerogative is the Christian's right to the intercession of the saints!

And now let us consider our relation to the greatest of the Saints, and the Queen of the angels, the Blessed Virgin Mary. When God became man He might have sprung into our life full grown. But it pleased Him to do infinitely better. For, as His greatest act of love towards us is His Incarnation, so has He inseparably joined it to our holiest human relationship, that of mother and child. He would be "made of a woman" (Gal. iv. 4), and God and a woman be Child and a Mother. Thus the immense grandeur of God's gift of His Only-begotten Son is sweetened with an equally vast gentleness and tenderness in the person of His Mother, who thereby becomes the great Mother of all mankind. She holds a separate place of holiness. She is high above

all saints in God's plan of our salvation, in time and eternity. The most Holy Trinity endowed her with the graces needed to make her the sole essential coöperator on the part of men in the extension of the Godhead among us. Her saving love is her Mother's love of God made man. She is fitted, if any created being could be fitted, to be natural Mother of the Word incarnate, and thereby Mother of all His brethren: loving Mother and mighty advocate of all men with her Son. As far as any human being could, she is made worthy to be obeyed by Almighty God Himself, as the God-man. His Mother is the principal and, we may say, the only perfect counsellor and confidant of the Sovereign Wisdom in His allotted task of enlightening and saving our souls. Mary is finally the perfect representative of each and all of us sinners in the atonement that God demands of us on Calvary, in union with her crucified Son.

We know that true friendship with any true Christian is at once a token and a means of eternal salvation. It is rarely inefficacious. And two men of no natural kinship, but of close friendship, are usually spoken of as being "like two brothers," for brother and sister naturally enjoy a unitive love. But no love compares with that generated by the union between mother and child. The relation between mother and child is enriched by the Creator with life's best and tenderest and most overmastering affection. Now this was, and perpetually is, to be the relation of the infinite God with our human nature through His Mother, the ever-blessed recipient of His heart's outflowing tenderness, our beloved Mistress and Queen, Mary of Nazareth and of Calvary.

It is an article of faith that, in the vast multitude of mankind, one is redeemed before she is lost, one and only one, Mary the Mother of the Redeemer Himself. "This holy Council," these are the words of the Fathers of Trent, "has no intention in the decree about original sin to include the blessed and immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mother of God." And in another place they affirm that she was free from all sin by a special divine privilege,

both mortal sin and venial, and that this privilege was hers through her entire life (*Con. Trid. De Justif.*, can. xxiii., and *De Pec., Orig.* 5). Finally in 1854 the Vicar of Christ, amid one of the most splendid solemnities of modern times, made Mary's Immaculate Conception more plainly understood, and most emphatically defined it an article of Catholic faith. The sun of her spirituality is the best and most abundant bestowal of the grace of the Incarnation of God's Son. Her spirit is filled with the effects of that goodness which "so loved the world as to give His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (John iii. 16). Her immaculate motherhood is taken up by this divine stream of salvation, and being the purest type of its cleansing, she becomes the leading personality in the whole discipleship of Jesus for distributing its superabundant graces. Mary is all that she is for man's salvation. St. Paul teaches that we are by nature "children of wrath" (Eph. ii. 3). But this could never be true of one destined to be Mother of One Who is divine compassion incarnate.

Usually it is the child that is sanctified by the mother, whose maternal influence for good is well nigh irresistible. But in Mary's case the reverse is found. Mary is redeemed by her Son, with a forethought of infinite love, saving her immaculate from Adam's sin from the first moment of her existence, flooding her soul with boundless waves of light, and of virtue and of grace, only to continue in ever-increasing plenitude each moment of her existence. And be it remembered that all this is in straight line with Christ's divine mission, which is our sanctification. His Mother is ours for our salvation. "All things are yours," exclaims the Apostle to us, "and you are Christ's and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. iii. 22, 23). Aye, even His heavenly Father is ours, and that blessed being who is His earthly Mother, shall not she be ours? After we have received from heaven the goodness of the Son, and "the charity of the Father and the communication of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor. xiii. 13), what of earth's best and noblest shall we not receive? "He that spared

not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not also, with Him, given us all things?" (Rom. viii. 22), especially His masterpiece of love, His Mother.

But might we not better say that God the Father has given *us to Mary*? As she is endowed with the amazing privilege of authority over His divine Son, shall she have none over us, poor, lowly mortals, no right to command, no claim to entreat, and to counsel and to reprove? Little it would seem was the room for exercising her authority over Jesus, since His Godhead ruled her own every thought. Yet she claimed Him in the Temple, and He meekly went home with her, and "was subject to her at Nazareth" (Luke ii. 51). Shall she not assert the same authority over me? Am I not a child of Mary, since I am a brother of her Son, being one of the "many brethren," among whom "He is the firstborn?" (Rom. viii. 29.) She, in whose motherly bosom there is room for divine maternity, shall not have less than the universality of human motherhood. She shall welcome to deepest and truest love every child of that God Whose Only-begotten Son calls her Mother—welcome us and insist on having us. This thy motherhood, O Mary, I humbly venerate. It is a fitting accompaniment of the divine gift of thy Son's Incarnation. I implore thee to witness my sincerity when I say to thee and proclaim to the whole world, that I will do thy bidding and be subject to thee in all things, as did thy Son Jesus, trusting that thou wilt, with a mother's affection, obtain for me the graces necessary to make this promise an efficacious one unto salvation.

To set forth the power of Mary, Holy Church makes use of God's words to Satan: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; and she shall crush thy head" (Gen. iii. 15). This is God's promise of a most blessed helper to us in temptation, the mighty woman that is His Son's Mother. And great is our need of her. Satan never ceases to lay his snares. He insinuates himself everywhere. He strives, at first, to seduce us totally; failing in that he would corrupt the good that we do by suggesting motives. We are not safe



from him even in our sleep, of whose phantoms he is often the author. No hour of strenuous labor but he would claim a share of it for turbulence, for dissensions among brethren. He "transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Cor. xi. 14), that he may delude the very elect of God by a false show of heavenly favors. He is present amid our thoughts without our knowing how he got there, mingling dangerous imaginations with our noblest aspirations. His hatred and envy against us is due to his despair at beholding us poor creatures enjoying that divine friendship which he so basely betrayed, and has lost forever. O God, our Savior, what shall be our refuge and our hope in the unequal struggle with this prince of darkness? It is Thy Mother, O my God, who by Thy appointment is our champion. Her power is ten thousand times as great as Satan's. She does not so much follow him in his terrible warfare against us, as she anticipates and thwarts his machinations beforehand. She does not lift hand or speak words, it is enough that she treads him under her virginal foot, despises his power, crushes his venomous head, expels him from our souls.

Witness the universal trust of God's servants in Mary's aid, and their invariable relief from temptation when they seek her intercession. It is her sweet fragrant breath that disinfects our souls from the plague taint of lust. It is her noble generous nature that communicates to us God's gift of holy fear in our prouder moments, that instills into our deepest springs of consciousness true motives from on high, when the stream of our well doing is muddled by the demon's suggestions of self-interest or of vainglory. The holiness and dignity of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, therefore ranks her among all creatures next to Jesus Himself. She is especially the type of all strictly human purity, natural and supernatural, ever virgin, virgin Mother, Queen of virgins, Spouse of the Holy Spirit. Not the faintest suggestion of uncleanness ever reached her. The sovereign purity possible in us mortals is hers. She is every man's virginal Sister and Mother to counsel and guide and refine—this masterpiece of holy



chastity. She is every woman's most confidential adviser in the problems of good and evil company, especially in their hours of relaxation. She is first witness of every Christian marriage. She is presiding spirit in every Christian home. Every victory over impurity is won by her intercession. She is enrolled by Holy Church in every sisterhood. Saints in their visions have seen her, joining with the nuns in chanting the divine office radiantly clad in their own habit. St. Teresa, when made superior over a seditious community, placed a statue of Mary in the place of honor, and exclaimed, "Behold your Prioress," and immediately the sweetness of peace was diffused everywhere, breathed out of the immaculate heart of the Mother of God.

What was God's original purpose but that He should make man His own by His love? He began with His Mother. God would have our human nature wholly yielded up to Him in love. How could this be better begun than by the love of a human mother for Him as her Son. And what nobler type of love could we desire to represent our love for God than that of one of our women, so sanctified and elevated in soul and body, as to be fitted (if such a thing could be) to be Mother of the God Incarnate. "God is wonderful in His saints" (Ps. lxxvii. 36) affirms the prophet, and in which of them so wonderful as in the best loved of all, His own Mother? And on our part, our heirship unto God is to be made "worthy to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light" (Col. i. 12). Now to whom among God's saints shall be allotted the brightest light to share with us, in God's holy faith, and the sweetest and strongest love to impart to us in the keeping of God's holy law, if not to her of whom it is written, "and the angel being come in said unto her: Hail full of grace the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women. . . . The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy [One] that shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God" (Luke i. 28-35).

When trials afflict us, we are led by Holy Church to the

cross of Christ, and like the tender Mother she is, the Church persuades us little by little, by her multiform influences, of that most marvelous of all verities, namely, that the King of immortal glory will acknowledge none for His subjects but crucified men. There on Calvary do we find our souls under a charm of mingled sweetness and pain, both so extreme as to overwhelm us. The immense pity of Jesus for sinners, the immense dullness of sinners, and their foul ingratitude, these two awful facts, the circuit of whose vastness embraces all heaven and earth, now begin to enthrall our attention, to strain our power of mental endurance. In the after effects we find that the Crucifixion of the Son of God becomes the absorbent (as if it were some divine medicinal bandage wrapped about our wounded spirits) of our weakness of character: the cross is the medicine of a languishing world. Calvary is the only cure of cowardice. And it is furthermore the spur of that superhuman zeal which is a peculiar trait of Catholic holiness. One's soul has as many tongues to proclaim the loveliness of Jesus Crucified as its Beloved has bleeding wounds, and it would herald the Crucified to all nations and for all ages with tones rivalling that "trumpet of God" (Thess. iv. 15), which shall finally assemble all mankind to the great judgment. Calvary becomes to the true Christian the true centre of the whole universe. Its lessons are the only wisdom of God. We join the Apostle in saying that our sum total of knowledge is fully written down in the one sign that looms over Calvary, that university of heaven's learning. Under this spell our life gradually so melts and moulds its forces that we are changed into exhibits of crosses and deaths, pains and glories, loves and sacrifices for God's honor and men's salvation: "I judged not myself to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ and Him Crucified" (1 Cor. ii. 2), exclaims one who experienced this transformation.

But even the Apostle's entire transfiguration with this painful glory pales into a secondary light when associated with that of the Mother of Jesus Crucified. For it is a law of God that

whosoever loves Jesus best shall suffer most. The hierarchy of merit is graded by love and by suffering. Motherly love and motherly sorrow can hold no second place in the distribution of Calvary's immortal prizes. The Mother of Jesus shall know better than all His brethren taken together what it means to redeem mankind. To her shall be spoken the heavenliest words at the command even of the Word made Flesh. And those words are the ones known in their entire meaning only by wounded hearts that have been wholly healed by the Crucified. "Woman, behold thy Son" (John xix. 26). She stood by Him to the last. She loved Him best, she must and she would suffer with Him most intensely. And, therefore, in the person of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, she must receive from her Son the whole human race into her heart. As a mother embraces her children, so must Mary take to her bosom all mankind. Therefore, furthermore, must each of us enter into that stainless heart, as a sick child into the enfolding arms of his all-pitying mother. To this embrace does Jesus Crucified bid us enter: "Behold thy Mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own" (John xix. 27). Thus did our divine Redeemer establish our sonship with Mary as the Mother of Sorrows.

The Catholic devotion to the Mother of Jesus was divinely instituted on Calvary as part of the process of our salvation. There did Jesus reward the best of His lovers with the fullest share of His sufferings. The Mother of the Redeemer, is it not fitting that she should be the Mother of the redeemed? Did not Simeon, a man so filled by the Holy Ghost that he was placed at the door of God's temple fitly to welcome Mary and Joseph entering there, to present the divine Child to His Father's service, did not Simeon speak for God when he joined her to the Crucified by his prophecy: "Behold this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts, thoughts may be revealed" (Luke ii. 34-35). She had suffered no pangs of childbirth when she gave Him forth from her sacred

womb to the Father, and presented Him for the adoration of Joseph and the Christmas angels at Bethlehem. But on Calvary the agonies of the new birth of all mankind were granted her in overflowing abundance. She offered Him again to His Father by her inalienable right as His Mother. None of us but has some little share of that privilege, for He is ours, He is our atoning sacrifice. Was it not said of Him, "Christ our Pasch is sacrificed?" (1 Cor. v. 7.) But which of us will deny the primeval and supreme right of His Mother to present Jesus Crucified to His Father as the price of our redemption?

The Apostle spoke true when he called his converts his children, and compared his labors for their salvation to the pains of maternity: "My little children, of whom I am in labor again, until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. iv. 19). Between figures of speech and actual realities, how essential the difference. Between the Apostle's high right over the souls of his disciples, and the incommunicable dignity of the one who bore the Redeemer in her womb, and brought Him forth into our life, whose very soul was struck and pierced, and ravaged and tortured by His dying agonies; between an Apostle of Christ, and Christ's Mother, how vast, how unspeakable a difference. Thus does Mary offer Jesus Crucified to His Father, whilst at the same time she offers herself the noblest trophy of His redeeming love. In this she is the type of the Church of Christ, which offers all her children, together with herself, to God in union with Christ, in the daily sacrifice of the Eucharist. Well does the Church bid us bless her unto "all generations" (Luke i. 48), in the invocations after Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament: "Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy." The colloquy of Jesus and His Mother, and St. John on Calvary, is the adoption of all our race into the Holy Family of Nazareth, and the offering of the redeemed to God in union with the oblation of Calvary.

Our love for her is approved with the seal of the most precious Blood. The words of Jesus to Mary and John were a most conspicuous part of the drama of Redemption. A



special providence called Mary to stand at the foot of the cross of Christ, and placed His favorite disciple at her side. Both are our representatives, as well as His own, the Mother being our foremost gift to heaven, our nature's perfect glory, and at the same time a type of all that God can do for us by a purely human instrumentality. She has the fullest possible allotment of Christ's own characteristic grace, namely, pitiful love for sinners. And John is a disciple and an Apostle, predestined to that singular grace and power which shall make him an official witness of Christ, one of those to whom He shall say before His Ascension into heaven: "You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria, and even to the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts i. 8). When the Holy Ghost shall come, Mary and John shall sit together in the cenacle to receive the fiery gift, as now they stand together gazing tearfully upon the death throes of Him Who shall bestow the life-giving Spirit. The death of Jesus was to John, and all to whom John is given as an Apostle, the beginning of love for Mary, which can be naught else than the perfect love of children for their mother. Whatsoever he received that must he give with overflowing measure, never reckoning worthiness or unworthiness, but only willingness on the part of the recipient. Our Lord had enforced this upon him, and all his fellow Apostles, when He said to them: "Freely have you received, freely give" (Matt. x. 8).

And what would be Mary's feelings? A sudden expansion into our limitless humanity of her motherly yearning for her Son Jesus. "Woman behold thy Son" forever rings in her ears, and melts her heart to this day as her vision sweeps the nations in search of sinners. Ask Mary, "Who is thy Son?" She answers, "The Crucified One is my Son, and so are all men my sons and daughters, for His Sonship to me is the means He chose of extending His salvation to all." In every single one of us Mary sees Him, and feels that she is His foremost minister



in effecting in us the salvation He won upon the cross. As Jesus is for sinners a Brother to redeem, so is Mary a Mother to caress and to attract sinners, and finally to place them in her Son's arms. All that is meant (if we could dream of understanding all its meaning) by her love for her Son is now relatively to be applied in our favor. The love of Jesus shall shine gloriously in the exercise of His Mother's prerogatives. The bride in the Canticles is Mary, so commentators tell us, and she is made by the inspired writer thus to speak of her divine Spouse in the early obscure searching of her interior life: "Have you seen Him Whom my soul loveth? When I had a little passed by them, I found Him Whom my soul loveth; I held Him, and I will not let Him go" (Cant. iii. 3, 4). In her motherly anxiety (if we dare speak of the emotions of one in heaven's highest glory) she looks far, searches out, and at last finds those whom her soul for Jesus' sake loveth, and she brings them home to Him.

Sometimes a poor penitent is overwhelmed with the memory of his former sinfulness. Some especially black wickedness, or some foul ingratitude of relapse into sin, throws a terror over him like Satan's net. He fears the very thought of God, and his fear is of that awful kind that is barren of hope. Then it is, O how great, a comfort to be trained from childhood to treat the gentle and yet powerful Mary as a representative of God, and one without any duty of justice, nay with no sense or feeling, towards a sinner except pity—a friend as close to God as a mother to her son, and knit to the sinner himself in the bonds of a mother's love. "My soul," she sang in the house of Zachary and Elizabeth, "doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke i. 46, 47). Now let us ask, who ever partook in God's rejoicing in saving sinners as fully as she who is the Savior's Mother and the sinner's Mother? And for those, too, who are striving to be noble and generous in their effort for Christian perfection, Mary immaculate has ever been the strongest advocate with Him, Whose glory is their whole aim and purpose.

## XXV.

### HUMBLED AND EXALTED.

THE standard definition of humility is a knowledge of self as true as God's. We obtain it by such a prayer as this: "O God, teach me the truth about myself." This prayer is made easily in early days, but in later life one finds a bitter purgatory in its granting, and exclaims: "O God, how little did I know myself till Thou didst discover me to myself by letting me run wild." The end is that "the just is the first accuser of himself" (Prov. xviii. 17).

Acquired humility is thus described by St. Bernard: "To despise the world; to despise no man; to despise self; to despise being despised by others—*Spernere mundum; spernere nullum; spernere seipsum; spernere se sperni.*" Equally psychological is another definition by the same Saint: "Humility is knowledge of our own defectiveness, of which we are glad in Christ Jesus because it is true knowledge, and because it opens wide opportunities to honor God and be submissive to our neighbor. No advance in virtue is possible till one knows his faults, and knows them as God knows them." Two things minister this boon. One is the secret admonitions of the Holy Ghost in prayer. The other is the same Holy Ghost using the censure of friends and the vindictiveness of enemies. Cherish devoutly the self-condemnations of your better states of prayer. Consider favorably what an enemy says of you, especially a well-meaning man. Suspect what a friend says; it is rose-colored by his love. Our humility thus simplifies the relationships of life; for a humble Christian looks on every man as his master, which is the A B C of divine sociology. Praise, though well meant, should be ill-received; blame, though ill-meant, should be well received. But

this mood is highly supernatural. "Our enemies," says St. Peter Fourier, "are excellent masters; they often teach us things our most intimate friends would rather not tell us." Alas that one should resent the candid censure of even a friend, and be all on fire at that of an enemy, for these clear the way for humility, the foremost of the moral virtues.

I had rather be servant than master—can I say that in all sincerity? The Son of God said it and acted it out. Study His Passion, and see mastery, human and divine, at its best. Study the Eucharist, and see which of the two, yourself or Christ, is master. Master men's minds by suffering for them; master men's hearts by bowing to their will.

A true prayer is: Lord teach me that I have no rights before Thy face but only obligations. Now if that be inspired by truth, so is this: Lord teach me that what my rights are towards Thee the same are they towards men: no rights at all but only duties. Here, finally, is my test: Shall I be honest enough to behave before men according to God's knowledge of men?

A full knowledge of past sinfulness ought to be reached by mere memory. But that faculty gives us only facts and figures; it takes no reckoning of guilt, which enters the Christian's mind through a supernatural influence; and, thanks be to God, one of our rudimentary graces is appreciation of sin. But a rudimentary vice is that of excuse often expressed thus: Self-defence is nature's first law. Excuses began in Eden; and St. Philip Neri called a disciple who excused himself for his faults: "Madonna Eve," my Lady Eve.

Why do we not correct our faults? For the same reason that a father does not punish the faults of a petted child—we are blinded by favoritism. Be disenchanted with self, and you will soon begin to advance in virtue. No man can seriously practice self-discipline who has a good opinion of the individual to be disciplined. "Let us estimate ourselves by our weakest moments" says St. Teresa (*Way of Perfection*, ch. vii., 5). In the soul's no less than in the body's sanitary report, it is not the

average temperature but the lowest mark of collapse, and the highest mark of fever, that show pathological conditions. The golden chain of virtue is strong as its weakest link and no stronger.

In many supernatural virtues we easily trace some natural root of partial perfectibility, as faith is helped by one's native reasonableness, hope by a confiding disposition, and charity by an affectionate one. But it seems that humility is root and branch an exotic in our garden, nay more, it is unwelcome company even to the native virtues. Yielding place to the unworthy, accepting less that evil men may have more—such traits run counter to our natural sense of justice. Yet grace soon forces a reflecting mind to a truer adjustment than the dislocation of our original corruption allows. Inflamed against self by God's enlightenment, justice has need for all its anathemas at home. Yet to see right reason in self-abnegation is not a dialectic discovery. Christian humility is never a philosopher's virtue. It was not Socrates but Christ Who said to our proud race: "Learn of Me that I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt. xi. 29). Thus the schoolmaster of anti-boasting is God. Is there any better? His ushers are the Christmas angels. "Down with pride of intellect," they exclaim, "for the wisdom of the Infinite is incarnate in this Babe; down with the arrogance of office, for almighty power is wielded by those tiny dimpled hands, and all majesty is in the fountain of those gently flowing tears; down with all pride of wealth, for that homespun swaddling cloth envelops the wealth of the Deity, and His treasurer is that poor woman who is enriched with the filial love of the eternal Son of God."

This divine Professor of lowliness has added the example of His life to the precepts of His gospel, and that in a way that carries overwhelming conviction. Blessed Thomas More was accustomed to attend the Rogation procession, walking humbly on foot. He continued this custom after he was made Lord High Chancellor of England, and his friends told him that on account of his dignity he ought to go on horseback. He an-

swered: "My Lord went on foot, I will not follow Him on horse-back."

When the spell of this virtue is on the soul, it punctuates its very prayers at intervals as short as the "Glory be to the Father" in the recitation of the Psalms. O God I am nothing, but glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, I am what I am. And this lowering of self, with the exaltation of God, is inwardly repeated as often as the refrain of a litany. Where in such a soul will you find the bitter fruits of pride, disobedience, singularity, reluctance to seek advice, self-willed austerities, criticism of high and low, refusal to take guidance from anyone, but God direct? The venerable Cardinal Tarugi lived to be eighty-three years old. He had been employed by the Holy See in the gravest concerns of religion, a man of much learning and of wonderful elevation of character. At the end of his life, his greatest boast was not of the high places he had held, nor of the stainless reputé he had enjoyed and deserved, but just this: "My boast is that for fifty years I have been the novice of Father Philip Neri. I have no other idea of myself than that" (Bacci's *Life of St. Philip*).

To a profane mind such spirits lack initiative; humility seems no better than the drillmaster of God's awkward squad, a virtue for incapables. As a matter of fact these placid, yielding characters readily give place to others in the bustle of human striving, but not so in divine works. Here the leaders are most often retiring characters, men who are little conscious of self. They will not act, much less lead, save by plain appointment of God, of whom the Psalmist says: "He will guide the mild in judgment, He will teach the meek His ways" (Ps. xxiv. 9). In the seventeenth century the mildest soul in Europe was Vincent de Paul, and the most daring innovator in good works. St. Ignatius, the most retiring of Christians, was a veritable dare-devil in God's holy warfare. In the things of God we must, like astronomers, sit in darkness if we would enjoy the light of celestial things. Says St. Catherine



of Siena: "If we would see the stars of God's mysteries, we must first descend into the deep well of humility." In the things of God's busier and outward vocations, meekness is mightier than arrogance. Of St. Athanasius, St. Gregory Nazianzen tells us: "His reproof spoke the kindness of a father, and his commendation the authority of a master." He was the man whose gentle power was the terror of heresiarchs, and the menace of tyrants.

One day St. Francis de Sales visited a Convent of Visitation nuns, and paper, pen, and ink were given him, "And he was entertained," says St. Jane Francis, in her evidence for his canonization, "to write down what he most desired of us. He did so, writing very carefully at the top of the page the one word, *humility*, and nothing else."

Humility is the best of the peace-making virtues, and this is the reason why the evil one hates it heartily, for he is always opposed to a tranquil and friendly condition among Christians. God is always in favor of peace; Satan is always against God. And what is God's way of making peace? Moving the party who is in the right humbly to give up. Also by enlightening the party in the wrong, and giving him the grace to yield humbly. In either case, and in every case, God's *via pacis* is the practice of humility. "I own that coat, you have stolen it, give it back." No! that is not the way of the Prince of Peace, but: "If a man will contend with thee in judgment, and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him" (Matt. v. 40). Or if the wrongdoer is to be counselled, then it is the inspiration granted by our Lord to Zacheus, who affirmed: "If I have wronged any man of anything, I restore him fourfold" (Luke xix. 8). Bear in mind that our Master insists on the right side giving up first, and after that the wrong side, going to extremes in making good the injury he has done. Is not a low opinion of one's own rights, and an extravagant one of others' rights, necessary in all this. Hence St. Paul's remedy for dissensions among brethren: "Let nothing be done through contention, neither by vainglory; but in humility let each esteem others better than

themselves" (Phil. ii. 3). To esteem others a better kind of humanity than oneself, damps the fires of suspicion. One does not easily suspect, much less resist, those whom he looks up to as better deserving than himself.

Can any man be more pitifully ignorant than the man who is ignorant of his own place and grade before God. Nay, who is not simply ignorant, but who is so far deluded as to rate himself ridiculously above his place. Hence the saying of Père Boudon: "We are never in a better state than when we think ourselves in the worst" (*Devotion to the Angels*, Part II., ch. iii.). Hence, too, a practical aim in the spiritual life is to receive contempt with patience always, to learn to do so readily, and finally to be glad of contempt. This disenchantment with self is not a form of despondency, for it only displaces self-adulation in favor of divine adoration, bringing into clearer and clearer relief God's infinite perfections, all of which are ours by the filial sentiments hereby engendered. This is according to what our Lord said to St. Teresa in a vision: "True humility is this: a soul's knowing what itself can do, and what I can do" (*Relations* v., 1). Christian humility leads direct to God; it was the path the Son of God trod when He came forth from the Father, it was that He followed when He returned to Him. On the eve of His Crucifixion, He said of that most humiliating event, "I go to the Father" (John xiv. 13). In the growth of grace within us, self-aversion guards us against straying away from God's guidance, for the choice is always between self and God. Humility corrects self-will, and turns our soul's native forces to useful religious ends. It opens our minds to good advice and good example. Humility clears the outer air for plain perception of God's providences, for the worst blindness is seeing things wrongly shaped, wrongly placed; and this form of blindness is that of proud men. Pride, too, has a weather gauge in the tongue. According to St. Bernard a proud man is "one who either boastfully proclaims himself what he is, or falsely proclaims himself what he is not."

It is not necessary to discuss the difference between pride and vanity, for both are but the action and reaction of self-esteem. Vainglory is pride turned inside out. If I act for self-approval only I am proud only. If I act for self-approval and man's approval, I am proud and vain. Sometimes it is said of a haughty character, he is too proud to be vain, but never is it said of a seeker after men's favor that he is too vain to be proud. For if I act for the approval of others it is that I may the more approve myself. How vivid the contrast between all this, and the holy acquisitiveness of men's favor which the humble feel, namely, the seeking of human affection that it may be the instrument of charity or of zeal for souls. Disinterestedness, according to Christ, is ambition disinfected of self-interest. But where shall we find this except in souls that are the most ripened fruit of God's perfection. Humility is the cure of all irritability. How can a man, whose thirst for humiliations is never quenched, be angry at bad treatment? If one is contentedly conscious of inferiority to his fellows, how can he resist any indignity whatsoever. Such a one is free from the commonest cause of quarrels in families and in communities, namely, the notion that he has rights that must be respected.

Read what St. Teresa says about this fruitful cause of dispute: the italics are all the Saint's own: "I often tell it to you, Sisters, and now I leave it to you here in writing, so that not only those dwelling in this house, but all who aspire after perfection, may fly a thousand leagues away from saying: I was in the *right*; it was not *right* for me to suffer this; they had no *right* to do such a thing to me. Now God deliver us from such wrong *rights*. Do you think there was any question of such *rights* when our good Jesus suffered the injuries which were so unrighteously heaped on Him" (*Way of Perfection*, Stanbrook, ch. xiii., 1).

We hear much call for energy in the religious world, and indeed there is a plentiful lack of it. But seldom do we hear praise of an energetic purpose to do humiliating things. Would that we all had such a readiness for humiliations as pious souls

have for visiting churches and hearing sermons. Would to God that a positive zest energized us for seeking to do obscure and thankless and disagreeable things for religion and our neighbor. Especially is this admirable in those whose office or whose worldly fortune makes them conspicuous among us. Here the remembrance of past sins is a useful brake on the wheels of vainglory. St. Augustine of Canterbury worked many miracles in the course of his missions among the English. Whereupon Pope St. Gregory wrote to him: "If you remember that you have at any time offended your Creator either by word or deed, always have that before your eyes, to the end that the remembrance of your guilt may crush the vanity in your heart." To which of us does not this admonition apply? Which of us has not some secret cabinet of tearful memories? What better pilgrimage can I ever make than to retire into it, fearful and thankful towards my offended God? And on emerging from this holy seclusion, I shall easily heed the Apostle's injunction of "being subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Eph. v. 21).

Good manners of the religious sort can be had only by cultivating humility, which is rightly defined as an habitual self-depreciation founded on truth. It makes us deferential, not condescending (which is always self-flattery) to our equals, readily open to advice, not averse to be blamed, justly or unjustly. In this holy mind we take others' faults leniently, so that in an opportune time we may gently chide them "in the spirit of meekness," considering our own delinquencies (Gal. vi. 1). Christ is undoubtedly opposed to self-assertiveness. Sometimes, indeed, we must stand up for God's rights to fulfill a bounden duty of correction, or to defend the cause of religion. But even here one should pause and think whether to yield for the moment may not gain a vantage ground for a future victory. St. Benedict had first established his monastery at Subiaco, and that was plainly by the divine will. But a certain priest of the neighborhood slandered him foully and publicly persecuted him. What did the Saint do? Stand his ground like a man, and fight for the good



cause of religion against its enemy? No; he acted quite otherwise. He left the care of God's honor to God's providence, and he departed from Subiaco, going to Monte Casino. Meekness, silence, patience were the roots of that monastic tree he planted there, whose leaves were "for the healing of the nations" (Apoc. xxii. 2).

"But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he who commendeth himself is approved, but he whom God commendeth" (2 Cor. x. 17, 18). This sounds clear enough. Yet who wills to stand or fall simply and wholly by God's judgment? Only a saint. Yet what approval can compare with God's? And whose approval is so easily to be had? Venerable Baronius tells us of St. Philip Neri: "He was a determined enemy of his own praises." Enemy; a man fights his enemies, resists and assails them. In this spirit a Christian hinders his being praised, suppresses his praise, and makes light of it; in every way he is indifferent, even averse to it. He does all this with determination; he is "a determined enemy of his own praises." It is a question of loving justice and truth or petty fraud; for when one has under stress of God's truth placed himself outside the praises of men, then the acceptance of their praise is to him a fraud. Having assimilated this principle of humility, let us adhere firmly to its practice, never desiring praise, never for a moment seeking it, never fishing for it in conversation, or countenancing it in our friends' talk, or tolerating the least sensation of pleasure in it when bestowed on us.

To them that love God in lowliness of spirit "all things work together unto good" (Rom. viii. 28), for everything sweet or bitter is referred to *Him* Who is supremely loved. To the vainglorious it is just the reverse; every good or evil thing in life tends to their injury. Is such a one prosperous? He is inflated. He is despondent in adversity. His very fidelity to pious practices sets him to sleep with false security. Is he active in religion or charity? This virtue of zeal is inspired by men's applause, and he presently becomes the statistician of his own achievements.



"For such a soul," says Père Chaigon, "the gift of tears, the gift of prophecy, would be a mortal poison." There are pious persons whose whole activity is striking attitudes, "to be seen of men" (Matt. vi. 16); they order their rooms and wear their clothes to draw compliments for their simplicity of life; they introduce and discuss topics to absorb attention and to be thought spiritual. Even they yield to others in order to advertise their own meekness. Are not these notorious symptoms of vanity alarming enough? Thanks be to God for the grace of being thus alarmed—may the Holy Spirit keep us vigilant against vainglory, which is the most blinding of vices. The very velleities of pride are unworthy of followers of Him Whose primary school tasks He thus describes: "Learn of Me that I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt. xi. 29). Far be it from any of His pupils to cherish such a thought about his good works as this: How will this look? What will my friends think of this? The cure of this tendency is a knowledge of one's real sinfulness, so vivid, so vigilant, as to constantly exclude deliberate pleasure in the thought of one's virtues.

The radical cure is the appreciation of God's rights, His sovereign rights, to all honor and glory on earth and in heaven. One would think that this doctrine is so plainly according to the truth, that humility would come easily into possession of our souls, according to the prayer of Christ to His Father: "Sanctify them in truth" (John xvii. 17). Doubtless, some degree of meekness does find a home in our motives. But in this, as in everything else, experience proves how very much our spiritual career depends on our repeatedly going back over the ground already tilled, and renewing the cultivation deeper, plowing here better, weeding there more carefully, draining more careful in another place. This is fundamentally true of the virtue of humility; its graces must constantly be renewed by prayer, and exercises of lowliness and the incessant application of its maxims both to our external and our mental condition.

A good test of any of our thoughts and words and deeds is

this: how would it stand examination before Christ? And that examination, an infinite scrutiny at the day of our death, is impending every day we live, as in the case of the Apostles: "And when they were in the house He asked them, 'What did you treat of in the way?' But they held their peace, for in the way they had disputed among themselves which of them should be the greatest" (Mark ix. 32, 33). The whole world, in the absence of Christ, now loudly, now secretly, disputes who shall be the greater. The moment He intervenes personally and asks what it is we are wrangling about, we are silent and ashamed. Ambition and pride is not so foul a sin as drunkenness, nor so base a one as avarice, but it is shameful enough among Christians at least. It is wholly contrary to our Redeemer's principles, glaringly opposed to His example. And it fills the soul with the clamor of its excuses: I must get that place of honor, to keep out such a one who is grossly unfit for it; I am advised to seek it by good men; I really do not desire honors, but I can serve God's ends in this place. I, I, I, always I, the only Christian way is to blindly follow our Master's maxim, "If any man desire to be first, he shall be the last of all and the minister of all" (Mark ix. 34).

## XXVI.

### MILDNESS AND FORCE.

A MILD tempered man is good company, and if prudent and pious he is the best of advisers; so much is freely admitted. But that he is the better sort of a leader of men sounds like a paradox, for mildness is commonly confused with timidity. Yet he is a better leader, though not a better driver of men.

To a right mind the great achievement of a Christian's day is making someone happy. In the family the greatest hero is the patient mother. In broader fields is it the Napoleons of history who have blessed their people, or the Washingtons who fight reluctantly, suffer silently, and give up every place of power gladly?

A gentle soul may lack initiative for acquiring dominion, and for defending personal rights; the very name of rights is to him a red signal of danger. But mark his ambition to lead in the service of the sick; follow, if you can, his busy steps among the poor; rival his kindly silence under insults. God grant you the instinctive ambition to achieve these high victories of Christ, the commonplace victories of self-forgetful souls. We repeat that among the mild-natured there is no aggressive force for vindicating personal rights, except these are identified with the rights of others; nor for any striving of self-interest. When such aims are to be compassed, look not to a humble Christian for a pattern of conduct. But if you would have a preceptor and a pattern to dispel ignorance, alleviate pain, stand valiantly against vice, then look for one whose views of self are dim, and whose light of charity is heaven's brightness.

Give me the undaunted spirit of the martyr, and you may keep the restless energy of the capitalist. Humility being the

truth about oneself, is indeed discouraging to self-assertiveness. But as it is also the truth about God, it generates the Apostle's spirit: "I can do all things in Him Who strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 13). Consider whether the following statement of right relationship to God be not true: "I would rather be infirm than strong before God, for the infirm He takes into His arms, while the strong He leads by the hand" (*St. Francis de Sales, Letters to Religious*, Mackey p. 422).

Mildness is the plumb-line of the spiritual builder, the soul's straight up and down between earth and heaven. No virtue is proved genuine till its possessor is proved humble. Even the claim of the supreme virtue of love must stand or fall by this test: "Charity is not puffed up" (1 Cor. xiii. 4). Or rather humility is that form of love which tests every other form; for anyone who loves God or his neighbor with sincerity, makes little of himself with equal sincerity. The road to God is the quiet by-path of the meek, rather than the glaring highway of the self-sufficient. Once a man asked St. Philip Neri to teach him how to meditate. He answered: "Be humble and obedient, and the Holy Ghost will teach thee." Holy Wisdom itself says: "Whosoever is a little one let him come to Me" (Prov. ix. 4). Retirement and recollection in God are kindred virtues to meekness.

When one fears to be hurt by the praises of men, he is never hurt either by their praise or blame; and he readily slips away from their society altogether, to commune alone with God. He will, however, make an exception for suffering souls or for outcasts, to help whom he is eager. St. Paul of the Cross once met the hangman of a certain town, and although it was a public place, he embraced him affectionately and otherwise treated him as an esteemed friend. The company of the most degraded of men, and that of the angels before the throne, has ever been a saint's alternation of work and prayer.

When one suffers injury he is entitled to reparation. A humble man postpones the use of this natural and divine right till

eternity. A yet humbler man cares nothing for vindication either in time or eternity, if the vindication or reparation is for his own personal satisfaction. Nay he greedily enjoys humiliation, and thanks the one who inflicts it in thought if not in word. And he seeks in his soul for the cause of any distress he may feel at the injustice of others. When I am in my right Christian mind, no book seems so good to read, no sermon so good to hear, as one that makes me feel ashamed of myself. Let me read the book of my own heart for this, and listen to the stern preaching of conscience. One of the saints compares humility to a honeycomb, which holds and stores the sweetness of other virtues, though in itself it is as tasteless and unpalatable as beeswax, and adds: "Let humility be always at work, like the bee at the honeycomb, or all your virtue will be lost."

A certain Carmelite nun in St. Teresa's time refused to accept the office of Prioress to which she had been elected. The Saint chided her for this strained humility, calling it "a foolish kind of perfection," and added that all were aware that she did not desire the office. Yet it remains true that one should avoid office as a rule, and accept it only regretfully, and under some sort of compulsion. St. Teresa gave example of this on several occasions.

It is to establish humility by painful self-knowledge, that God visits us with His chastisements. As He said by His Prophet: "I will chastise thee in judgment, that thou mayest not seem to thyself innocent" (Jer. xxx. 11).

The difference between the boastful Pharisee and the shrinking bashful publican is that the one relates his virtues to God, and the other deplores to Him his sinfulness. Much the same is the difference nowadays between certain devout souls and ordinary penitents. Only we are too shy to tell God frankly, as the Pharisee did, that we are better than others; therefore we insinuate it and take it for granted; and we make it a mental reservation, even while we verbally proclaim our sinfulness. From self-excusing as a habit of mind, to that of self-accusing,



the journey is a long one. By nature self-excuse is the whole purpose and plan of our dealing with God. Self-accusation is the fruit of divine grace, a fruit sowed in tears and gathered in joy (Ps. cxxv. 5).

The deeper kind of prayer takes refuge from self-contempt in the adorable perfections of God. The "Wise Spirit of God," so runs a maxim of St. John of the Cross (No. 302), "Who dwells in humble souls, inclines them to keep the treasures He has bestowed on them hidden, and to manifest their own imperfections." The secret of a good meditation is taught in those words. When nature after long practice ceases to rebel at any humiliation whatsoever, "God meanwhile being the motive," then the more intimate touches of divine love are felt in the soul. "He who possesses a good foundation of humility," says Ruysbroeck, "does not need many words for his instruction; God teaches him more than he can make known to others. Such men are God's disciples."

A certain eagerness of zeal too often blinds the eyes of good men to their lack of meekness. Although St. Charles Borromeo was one of the sternest disciplinarians the Church has ever known, and constantly visited culprits with the rigors of the law of God and of the Church, yet this zealot for reform was a man of native sweetness of character, and was never known to yield to irritation or even to feel it, so that he never rebuked a fault without pain. It was conscience not imperiousness that was the spring of his discipline, which was the most efficacious known in ecclesiastical history. Once he came across a priest of a carping disposition, who found fault with him most unjustly. The Saint actually made him a member of his household, kept him there till the end of his life, and in his will provided an annuity for his support. "Fear not daughter of Sion. Behold thy King cometh to thee, sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of her that is used to the yoke" (Matt. xxi. 5). The triumph of Jesus, the greatest of our reformers, is not warlike; His steed is an ass' colt; His military staff a handful of peasants; He is not

greeted with the blare of trumpets and the fierce shouts of many veteran legions, but with the hand clapping of peaceful citizens and the worship of little children. O Prince of gentle peace! Welcome to our hearts and homes, to our cities and our temples! Be Thy gracious kindness our only model of force, Thy divine meekness our constant study. Who indeed can help adoring the Son of God with overwhelming fervor when He thus appeals to us: "I am in the midst of you as He that serveth" (Luke xxii. 27).

One of the conspicuous graces of Christ's forerunner was his giving up his entire ministry in favor of the new dispensation in which he was to have no part—he lifts his voice and proclaims the Lamb of God, and presently he is prematurely dismissed from life with the crown of martyrdom. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John iii. 30), exclaimed the Baptist, when his disciples would have him prolong his mission in union with that of Jesus. These words not seldom find application among ourselves, as when some fellow-servant steps before us in God's providence and takes up a holy work we had begun. He gains the praise which we had earned by originally making the undertaking possible, conceiving it and planning it and overcoming the first and most serious difficulties: and now he grows in the eyes of men, and we fade out of sight. This we must endure as did the Baptist, or rather we must with him "rejoice with joy" (John iii. 29).

The praise or blame of men counts little among the reckonings of Calvary. A young novice once asked St. Macarius for spiritual advice. The old hermit said to him: "Go to the cemetery and upbraid the dead, and after that go again to them and flatter them." The novice did this, and then came back to his preceptor, who asked him: "Well what answer did the dead make?" "None at all," answered the novice, "neither to my blame nor to my praise." The Saint replied: "I counsel thee to do likewise; learn to be moved neither by injuries nor by flatteries—a sign that thou hast died to the world and to thyself."

The genesis of an heretical tendency is as various as are the delusions of the human mind. But pride is the deepest root of the baleful plant, pride and the vanity born of the mutual praises of proud men banded together for resistance to God's dogmatic teaching authority. Remember our Savior's reproach to the Jews: "How can you believe, who receive glory one from another, and the glory which is from God alone you do not seek?" (John v. 44.) The final persistence of a heretic is due to the same mingling of self-praise and the flattery of friends: these are the means that harden pride of opinion into final obstinacy. St. Bernard said of Abelard, the arch-heretic of his day, that he knew everything in heaven and earth except himself. This spirit is usually accompanied by proud disdain of men of inferior mental gifts or of imperfect education. Pride is the characteristic trait of the reprobate, and is, says St. Gregory, "The most manifest sign of being lost."

Of course this is more conspicuously true of the deadlier forms of this sin. But even in its lesser grades, nay even amid our strivings after perfection, pride is to be detected—at least as a temptation—in almost every effort to advance. As St. Augustine says: "Other vices are to be feared in sins, pride is to be feared even in good deeds." How virtuous is that man who knows his own frailty, how wise is that man who knows his own ignorance," says St. Bernard. Father Lawrence Scupoli, the sainted Theatine, was bitterly maligned, slandered, and persecuted, even his priestly chastity was calumniated. His brothers and superiors were poisoned against him. He was forbidden to preach or help men's souls in any way. Calmly and meekly he accepted it all, and remained for years like a prisoner in his cell. His vindication came in God's good time, and then as the fruit of his meekness he presented Christendom with his book, *The Spiritual Combat*, the favorite reading of multitudes of saintly souls, notably of St. Francis de Sales.

The afflictions of life, including the misunderstandings of our associates, if received with the fierce resistance of what is

called a high-spirited temperament, leave the soul soured. If endured with the meekness of Christ, these adversities cleanse the soul of its self-conceit, leave a sweet feeling of content, and often enough minister to works of highest usefulness, as in the case of Scupoli. The defiant resistance of the stoic burns him to ashes; the humble resignation of the Christian adds dignity to his character, and opens to him new sources of interior consolation.

It would seem that nothing could humble us more than falling from a good state of fervor suddenly into some wretched and deliberate venial sin—a calamity well known in our spiritual history. Yet is it not a deeper sense of degradation to find that our virtues themselves have led us into vice; that our holy wisdom has degenerated into human policy; our modest bearing into hypocritical craving for praise; our zeal has grown headlong and censorious; our candor has quickly turned into gossip, and we have grown quite thoughtless of our neighbor's sensibilities, perhaps even of his rights? But the reaction brings a harvest of wisdom. Self-contempt follows upon petty baseness, even as in great sinners stern dismay attends on the awakening from grievous sin. Not seldom one laments an act of selfishness, of meanness with an intensity that rivals the horrors of eternal remorse in hell. We cannot but know that the fault was in itself trifling, done from surprise and in a moment of passing weakness, yet the memory of it in a later stage of life's journey is a blessed lighthouse on the darksome shore of vainglory.

What is humility? It is an inner state of glorying in one's infirmity, in order that the power of Christ that has worked such great things in us may be the more honored. "Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Cor. xii. 9). My own sufficiency is hereby annihilated, and all my strength and my light is God's. St. Paul shows how this influences a really strong nature. For when he told of things that seemed to his advantage, it is manifestly his tongue not his heart that speaks. But when he recounts what humiliates him, his heart speaks by the instrument of his tongue,



heaping confusion on himself, styling himself with accents of undeniable sincerity, a blasphemer, a persecutor of Christ in the person of His followers, an abortive kind of Christian, the last of the Apostles, and unworthy to bear that name (see Alban Butler, June 30).

The Apostle in the first chapter of First Corinthians reads a hard lesson of humility to Christians who follow intellectual pursuits. "God," says he, "hath made foolish the wisdom of this world." Why? Because the world "by wisdom knew not God;" it was "the foolishness of preaching" that saved men's souls. And as a matter of fact is anything more foolish than to proclaim that a Crucified Galilean "is the wisdom of God and the power of God?" I had rather—this is St. Paul's meaning—be foolishly crucified with Christ than wisely exalted with the Greek philosophers. When Aquinas was asked the source of his wisdom, he said not a word of Aristotle, whose genius he reflected so brilliantly: he pointed to his crucifix. Everything he taught he was persuaded firmly was one form or other of the humble wisdom of loving God and man, "unto death, even to the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 8). So the force of this new wisdom, when it became personalized, took the form of a community of men and women, very humbly placed in the scale of this world's influences, made up of "not many wise according to the flesh, not many noble, but the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the strong. And the base things of the world and the things that are contemptible hath God chosen, and the things that are not, that He might bring to naught the things that are: that no flesh might glory in His sight" (1 Cor. i. 25-29).

Look well to it that your wisdom be grounded in a low opinion of self, that as parent or friend, teacher or preacher or writer, your Master humbled unto crucifixion be your Model. The burden of every Christian teacher's instruction must be some trait of Christ's life, some principle of Christ's doctrine, and a



summary of His doctrine is this: "Learn of Me for I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt. xi. 29).

"Let not your good be evil spoken of" (Rom. xiv. 16), are words of admonition to those whose force for good is but native zest for slaying an adversary. The most costly viands may be spoiled in cooking; and the cheapest food be made appetizing. So it is with God's glorious truth. It may be so served up so as to be loathsome even to well-meaning inquirers, for the truth we teach we prepare in our minds, as we prepare food in the kitchen. And our listeners take it or leave it according as we have made it appetizing: "The ear trieth words, and the mouth discerneth meats by taste" (Job xxxiv. 3). If our holy faith tastes raw to those with whom we discuss it, that is because our own spiritual character is immature. Mature judgment in spiritual matters is the fruit rather of humble prayer than of study: "Be prudent therefore and watch in prayers. . . . If any man speak let him speak as the words of God" (1 Peter iv. 7-11).

## XXVII.

### REASONABLE SERVICE, OR OBEDIENCE.

"And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them" (Luke ii. 51).

THIS is the only record we have of the thirty years that Jesus spent at Nazareth, excepting the brief statements that "He advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace before God and man" (Luke ii. 52), and that He was "the carpenter" (Mark vi. 3), and the "Son of the carpenter" (Matt. xiii. 55). His first recorded words also tell of obedience: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke ii. 49.) In one word St. Paul summarizes His whole career in the mutually exchangeable terms of humility and obedience: "He humbled Himself becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 8). A mighty virtue, therefore, is obedience, dear to our Redeemer's heart, of just renown among all Christians, entering deep into all spiritual life.

"Jesus was conceived by the obedience paid by Mary to the words of the angel; He was born at Bethlehem by obedience to Cæsar's edict; He lived in obedience to His parents; He died in obedience to His Father. Although He now reigns in heaven, He still wishes to obey men, especially in the Eucharist" (Crasset's *Meditations*, Oct. of Corpus Christi).

The great obedience is fidelity to conscience; to conscience, enlightened by Christ's teachings in Holy Church. To this is joined patient submission to the dispositions of Providence in our daily lives. Externally, it must be not a grudging, but a prompt, ready conformity to all lawful authority, beginning with our parents in early days. Interiorly, it must be affectionate and

uncritical: "And do ye all things without murmurings and hesitations" (Phil. ii. 14), as the Apostle teaches. Let this practice grow into a habit, and it keeps off trouble; it smoothes difficulties; it blends with kindness, winning the gratitude of superiors and equals, and pleasing God exceedingly. Always supposing divine motives, especially the imitation of our Lord. This splendid virtue is man's tribute of love to the sovereignty of God. It is inspired by the realization of the closeness of God to all lawfully constituted authority. If one can quickly behold and reverence the heavenly Father in all institutes, from the Church of Christ down to the humblest Christian household, from the President and Congress down to the village justice, such a one "serves as a son with a father." How great an error, then, to suppose that there is anything degrading in conforming either to the law of the State or of the Church and their ministers. How gross an error to fancy that one is freer in proportion to his lack of obedience to authority, whether in Church or State. He alone is free who is emancipated from self-will, the fiercest tyrant of mankind.

Sometimes we halt in our obedience because he who calls for it happens personally to be unworthy. Christ our Lord obeyed Pontius Pilate as standing for God, though he was the most unworthy of men. "Thou shouldst not have any power over Me, unless it were given thee from above" (John xix. 11), said our Savior, yielding Himself helpless into Pilate's hands.

A kindly tendency to yield to the will of another as far as God's law allows, is one of the most lovable traits of a manly character. Nor need this smother the spirit of enterprise or of self-help or of personal activity. On the contrary it wins a supremacy over others; it gains adherents for one's own initiative, for it attracts love. The practice of obedience for the love of God saves us from the wreck of headlong self-will; it also permits us prudently to trust ourselves in beginning and carrying to completion any good work.

Obedience is the conformity of man to God. It is imme-

diate when paid to God speaking by an enlightened conscience, and the inspirations of grace. When God speaks by His Church, in her doctrine and discipline, by His scriptures, by the behests of all who lawfully exercise authority, conformity is only one link removed from direct contact with the Deity, and that link, by divine magnetism, transmits the heavenly message to conscience. All adhesion to God's representatives in the external order is calculated to purify, enrich, and enforce inner conformity to Him. Its second purpose—a very practical one—is the use of the outwardly expressed divine will, to test the validity of the interior impulses of religion. For it is by our outward union with God's men that we make sure of our union with God's inspirations. It is thus that our inner life may be the "reasonable service" (Rom. xii. 1) commended by the Apostle.

Obedience is often ranked as the hardest of virtues. It surrenders, indeed, our dearest birthright, our liberty. Hence real obedience is connoted with clear perception of God's rights lodged in His representatives. When the rights of God are seen in men, as in parents, prelates, priests, and religious superiors, their claims are admitted to be the claims of God. Another help is the sentiment of kindness which follows the conviction, "that it is a more blessed thing to give than to receive" (Acts xx. 35). Most men easily share their mental gifts, their learning and ability, and many men do not grudge to give away their money. They feel honored by their generosity. Why is it that they feel degraded by obedience which is giving to other men, for God's sake, a share of their independence? The greatest obstacle to obedience is the feeling that it is an unworthy thing to do another's will. But the supreme worthiness of our life is in making others happy. And is not this best done by personal service? That it is not always without pain does not lessen its value, but rather enhances it. Our Lord once said to St. Teresa: "There is no obedience where there is no resolution to suffer; think of My sufferings and then every obedience will be easy." Pain there is and joy there is in every true-hearted act of Christian virtue.

Hearty obedience springing from conviction of right and duty produces uniform peace of mind. Grounded in a clear view of God's purpose to reveal His will by human instrumentalities, it is intelligent; and rudimentary kindness suffices to make it affectionate. Submission to external divine agencies is a symbol of interior love, both for God and for man; it is also a channel of its communication. A Christian spirit of submissiveness is both a guerdon of Christian peace and a criterion of Christian perfection. Herein is seen how the two mediums of divine authority, the outer and the inner, blend together in a single influence of outward love. Conformity which is barren of interior fruit is that which is reluctant and disputatious. The right kind purifies our "souls in the obedience of charity with a brotherly love" (1 Peter i. 22).

Hence to very many the imitation of Christ lies mainly in the practice of obedience. Fidelity, loyalty are terms telling the whole story of many saintly lives. For "he that strives to draw himself from obedience, withdraws himself from grace" (*Imitation*, Book III., 13). The obedience of some is willing only when it is an act of human friendship rather than of divine charity, it is only a tribute of personal affection. Let us be on our guard and take God fully into account, obeying holily as well as affectionately. But let superiors remember that this virtue can be practised smoothly by the majority of men, only when submission is given to one whom they personally esteem or at least respect.

Viewing all states of life, all kinds of characters, this virtue enters the current life of spiritual men more than any other. Not that this one can substitute itself for all the others, but because a tendency to pass over one's own will, in favor of that of others for God's sake, finds an unbroken succession of occasions for virtue. And because everything we do may be in obedience to a rule of life, and a joyful advertence to that rule as the expression of God's will is easily made habitual. Without the thought of God in the mind, one may be very compliant, yet not at all obe-



dient. The hardest problems of life are easily solved when the terms of equation are love and duty.

Real obedience is not so much submission as loyalty. Reverence and affection produce the submission that is an interior virtue. My primary relationship to my superior is reverence for his office, following this is my affection for himself, because he is my superior and stands for God. We do not deny that pressure is sometimes needed to elicit conformity; but in a really obedient man the pressure is brought to bear by himself and not by his superior.

St. Fructuosus was Bishop of Tarragona in Spain when the persecution of Valerian II. broke out. The soldiers came to his house in the night. "Come," they said, "the governor has sent for you and your deacons." "By all means let us go at once," exclaimed the Bishop, "or will you wait till I put on my shoes?" "Please yourself about that," they answered. When he was ready they took him to prison, and later to martyrdom. He obeyed these wretches thirsting for his blood, as if they were dear friends, urging him to come to some delightful meeting. "Let us go at once, or will you wait till I put on my shoes?" Small danger of such a man's setting up his own will against God's, since in order to do God's will he submits himself gladly to the will of murderers, even unto death after the example of his divine Master.

Here is a test of my right standing with God: When the word obedience shall savor to me of love, then shall obedience be true, and love be proved genuine. Submission to God develops the filial relation to God as St. Paul says of Timothy: "Now know ye the proof of him, that as a son with a father, so hath he served with me in the gospel" (Phil. ii. 22). How far this is from the obsequiousness of a hireling; how much above even the merely natural affection of a brotherly fellow-worker. There is a divine sonship in obedience, begun, perhaps, in human affection, but striding onward to conscious imitation of the inner life of the Son of God Himself. St. Francis de Sales says in one

of his letters to St. Jane Francis de Chantal (the italics are his own): "Here is the general rule of our obedience written in great letters: *We must do all by love and nothing by force. We must love obedience rather than fear disobedience.* I leave you the spirit of liberty, not that which excludes obedience, for this is the liberty of the flesh; but that which excludes constraint, and scruple and worry" (*Letters to Persons in the World*, Mackey, p. 160).

Obedience is of two kinds. One, that difficult submissiveness when my superior's purposes run counter to my own, and I set my own aside in favor of his for the love of Jesus Christ. The other, that easy virtue, when I not only do what my superior prescribes, but would do it anyhow, because I believe in it and love it for God's sake. This latter is the obedience of heaven. The former is the obedience that wins heaven. Mademoiselle Le Gras, inseparably associated with St. Vincent de Paul in his greater works of charity, was sent by him to establish a branch of them in a certain diocese, and was expelled by the bishop. The Saint wrote to her: "Our Savior will receive more glory from your submission than from all the good you could have done. One diamond is worth more than a mountain of stone. And one act of submission is worth more than any number of good works."

Some object that a religiously obedient soul is devoid of initiative, that he is a mere machine moved by authority. This is not so. St. Paul's disciples were, like himself, the freest and most venturesome of spirits, and he exhorts Titus to instruct them both "to obey at a word," and "to be ready to every good work" (Titus iii. 1). Here is instant obedience coupled with ready initiative. A great desire of doing good, if it be really a grace from heaven, holds fast to friends, and is capable of a familiar and easy submission to superiors as heaven's representatives.

"In proportion as you are hindered," says a great servant of God, "from doing the good you desire, do the good you do not desire." This way of dealing with authority he praises as a

straight road to perfection. On another occasion the same saint wrote to a friend: "Every day I learn not to do my own will, and to do what I do not want to do." And he was the ruler of a diocese!

We often hear of blind obedience. The Catholic meaning of the term is that I am not only to do what I am told by my superior, but that I am to incline my mind to accept his reasons for it, because he is my superior, blind to what seems to be his defects of judgment; and highly appreciative of his graces and opportunities for being rightly guided. If it happens to be hard for me to acquire this feeling, at least I can suspend my own adverse judgment. Besides external conformity to what is deemed an unwise command, it is furthermore the part of true obedience, first, to suppress even interior murmuring; second, to go beyond that and to take the superior's point of view and endeavor to see things as he does; and, third, always and during every mental process, to sternly overcome feelings of personal repugnance. "I had rather be obedient at the expense of prudence than prudent at the expense of obedience" (*St. Francis de Sales, Letters to Persons in the World*, Mackey, p. 211). Herein is the sum and substance of blind obedience.

A superior's advantages in forming an opinion of the wisdom or unwisdom of any course of action are manifest, since he has the grace of his office to enlighten him. St. Ignatius says: "Prudence is more necessary for him that commands than for him that obeys." He is subject to that need by God's will, and therefore God is responsible for his guidance. This does not often go as far as the miraculous, but it certainly covers all practical ground of action. Is it too much to say that in a case between my superior and myself, God's guidance is with him rather than with me? No greater mistake can be made than belittling the supernatural light granted to superiors. All who have held office bear witness that an interior change took place in them, and a new region of grace was entered when they were placed over others. There was a plainer sense of nearness to

God; a new feeling of responsibility to Him, together with an increase of humility; new impulses of kindness, a better estimation of the good qualities of the brethren; new homage was paid to the virtue of prudence, and to that of fortitude, and a keener search was made for supernatural motives of conduct. Now the subject should recognize all this. You find it in devout men and women who have once been superiors, shown by their reverence for office, appreciation of its graces, and suppleness of mind towards the superior's views. The subject has not the supernatural lights peculiar to office, he has the grace of obedience.

The superior enjoys natural advantages also. He seldom commands without forming his opinion slowly and carefully, he takes counsel with official advisers, and he rarely acts, if even one is emphatically against him; he generally consults other advisers, in grave matters he always does so. These valuable aids to prudence are part of his law, provided for in every religious rule. Against the judgment thus formed stands that of the subject, not seldom acting wholly alone, often under sudden impulse, perhaps under sore temptation, with few counsellors, and they too often eccentrics, or members with a grievance—counsellors worse than none at all. The superior has the broad outlook of his watch tower, a full comparison of persons, of works, and of times and circumstances. The subject is down on the ground, a private in the ranks. The superior is interested for the whole institute, disinterested as to particular persons and things; his motives are general, the common good demands his consideration. The subject's range is his particularism, generally his private convenience.

True obedience is not mechanical, indifferent to views and opinions, but it is an inquiring state of mind, desirous to know the superior's motives. Least of all is it sullen, outwardly conforming, inwardly grumbling. Nor does a right-minded subject fail to communicate every real difficulty he finds in the task laid on him, doing so to aid the superior and not by way of protest, meanwhile cultivating an uncritical attitude of mind. The obe-



dience we are considering is not merely professional; it is religious and filial, and therefore affectionate. Can such qualities fail to win over a superior to a really truer view of things?

We are not favoring the sudden expulsion of one's own opinion, and the theatrical embracing of the superior's (for who knows but that he may be persuaded to change his mind), but a reasonable readiness to be oneself persuaded, virtuous enough to be so, humble enough to defer to authority to that degree. Or if not able to do so in conscience, to drop all question of reasons and motives, releasing the mind from the stress of solitaire argumentation about them; above all to be silent about them among the brethren.

This doctrine is not the teaching of extremists, nor of only one school of writers. The entire body of our spiritual guides are committed to the doctrine that an obedient man not only should direct his efforts to fulfilling his superior's commands, but should also conform his views, or at least make an honest effort to do so. Some writers go farther than others in enforcing this. Not all use the same illustrations nor even the term "blind." Not all say as St. Ignatius did (borrowing, by the way, his expressions from venerable Fathers of Holy Church): "Obey like a corpse, obey like a walking stick." But the whole chorus of Catholic teaching says in unison: Bend your views as well as your actions to lawful authority; or if you positively cannot do that, at least you can and must cease to discuss the matter with superiors and with others, even cease to discuss it with yourself.

Many a one is scared by the term "*blind*" obedience. But why not be scared off from loving God by our Savior's saying? "If any man come to Me and hate not his father and mother—he cannot be My disciple" (Luke xiv. 26). As the word "hate" in this passage is used figuratively, so is the word "blind" in that which tells of disinterested obedience. Taken literally our Lord exhorts us to a crime; taken figuratively He exhorts us to absolute devotedness to a divine vocation. Many a one in fact is accused of literally hating his parents when he leaves home to



join a religious order. So are we accused of blindness in obeying when we fix our glances exclusively upon the will of God in submitting to our rule and our superiors.

One of the best uses of a figure of speech is that it does not immediately convey its full meaning, but requires explanation: witness our Savior explaining His parables. "Love is blind"—a universal motto. We should love blindly, if at all; we cannot deeply love otherwise. There is something admirable in the blind confidence between man and wife. What is the trust of children in their parents? Blind or none at all. I aspire to be similarly minded towards my rule, my founder, my superiors, in all matters of our common life, including obedience. When a superior and a subject differ in opinion about the latter's duty, the whole outcome turns on this: Do they love each other? If yes, then love is blind, and therefore when candid discussion is done, the superior is won over, or the subject is won over, or at any rate he has sidetracked his views and opinions.

Blind is a strong adjective in this connection; but earnest natures deal in strong language, just as earnest action often verges on excess. Zeal and fanaticism often look alike and talk alike. If you are flagging a train of cars to prevent collision, you act like a maniac to an onlooker who does not know your purpose.

The gravest difficulty in obeying is mental obstinacy. Self-opinionativeness is as stubborn as it is self-conceited. Among the varieties of the first capital sin is pride of opinion. St. Philip Neri once said to his disciple: "Perfection is in the breadth of three fingers," and as he spoke the Saint laid three fingers lengthwise across his forehead.

## XXVIII.

### CHASTITY.

ST. TIMOTHY was a Saint, and trained by a saintly mother (2 Tim. i. 5), yet St. Paul writes to him with an accent of sternness: "Keep yourself chaste" (1 Tim. v. 22). Of the foul vice opposed to chastity the same Apostle writes to the Ephesians: "Let it not so much as be named among you" (Eph. v. 3). Well do these admonitions apply in our day, when the brutishness of pagan times has come back upon us, and Christendom finds itself invaded by uncleanness in every form. To be good, or to do good, one must now walk among lewdness. Literature, art, society, law, politics, and every sort of amusement are all tainted, or threatened with taint of wantonness. To serve God in purity of life one must be like the chaste moonbeams shining on an ocean of filth. To help save souls, and yet to keep free from contagion oneself, one must be equipped with the vigilance of a life-saver on some storm-beaten coast. Yet to fight this awful carnality, every Christian is enlisted under the cross of the Virgin's Son. Let us engage in the conflict with a courage worthy of our Leader and our cause. "Thanks be to God Who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. xv. 57).

Our Savior calls chastity the angelic virtue, teaching that in the future life, His friends "shall neither marry nor be married, but shall be as angels of God in heaven" (Matt. xxii. 30). The expression "pure as an angel" has become a proverb. His purity is in one way superior to ours, for it is inherent in his nature, and ours is the prize of a hard-fought battle. In the angels there is no ugly fever of lust, for flesh and blood they have none, but our flesh and blood incessantly strives to smirch our soul,

which though created "a little less than the angels" (Ps. viii. 6), is chained to the carnal body, like a prince of brightness to a demon of the deep pit. We need the company of our guardian angel as an incentive to purity of life, to help us love God on earth, as he, pure spirit, loves Him in heaven.

Although not indeed angelic, our purity is glorious because militant. It waves the banner of the many victories of our spirit over the rebellions of flesh and blood; over native tendencies to uncleanness; the allurements of dangerous company; the delusions of cunning excuses, all vanquished by a valiant and aggressive purity of soul. On the other hand, if there can be such a thing as joy in hell, it would be the triumph of the fiends at the fall of a devout Catholic into moral filthiness. The demons would fain snatch the veil of innocence from his head, and bear it stained and torn in a dreadful orgy of victory among the damned. This would be Satan's dearest insult to Christ, his immortal enemy, the King of virgins.

As the citizens of the heavenly kingdom are beings in whom sexual feelings are non-existent, so should God's kingdom on earth be ruled and made up of men and women in whom the sexual instinct is under the perfect control of reason and grace—angelic men and women. Great human models are not wanting. We prescind our Redeemer, for both the human and divine natures were His: "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead corporeally" (Col. ii. 9). But look at the angelic valor of the virginal Elias, the angelic obedience and detachment of the virginal John the Baptist named by our Lord "an angel" (Matt. xi. 10); the angelic wisdom of the virgin disciple, "whom Jesus loved" (John xix. 26); the angelic zeal of the virgin Apostle of the Gentiles, who was wafted up to heaven to be initiated before his time into the company of angels. All these are glorious human models of our angelic virtue. And presently we shall treat of the angelic and more than angelic dignity of chastity in the virgin Mother of God, before whom the heavenly ambassador bowed down in lowly reverence.

Do you aspire to be as fearless in God's cause as Elias the prophet; to be as austere as John the Baptist; to be as wise and prayerful as John the Evangelist; as zealous a convert maker as the Apostle Paul? Then bear in mind that each of these, and especially the Mother of Jesus, their Queen, was preëminently distinguished for chastity. To everyone who longs for a holy life his guardian angel puts the question: "Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord; or who shall stand in His holy place?" And he gives the inspired answer: "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart" (Ps. xxiii. 3, 4). O Lord Jesus Christ, show me ever brighter ways of stainless purity, for my soul is espoused to Thee, and our nuptial vows are renewed constantly in Holy Communion. Grant me a shrinking dread of the least defilement, and anxious appreciation of all needful safeguards in my daily life.

Christian purity is the most exquisite of virtues. It produces a refinement of mind and of manners wholly peculiar to the discipleship of Christ; it enjoys a sense of inner cleanness, a shrinking sensitiveness to the least outward danger; it forms the noblest type of manhood, the loveliest type of womanhood. It was, as we have already said, foreshadowed in the ancient heroes of God's people, Elias and Eliseus; it was a holy splendor in John the Baptist, and was made the eternal boast of the male sex in Joseph, the virginal spouse of Mary. And it is of essential significance that the great Mother of God was not only pure, not only immaculate from the first moment of her existence, but was a virgin, ever and perpetually *the* virgin, to be acclaimed in all ages the Blessed Virgin, the Virgin of virgins. The Holy Spirit, by Whose overshadowing she was made the Mother of God, could salute her as His Spouse: "Thou art all fair, O My love, and there is no spot in Thee" (Cant. iv. 7). The purity of Christ was thus rightly served by the purity of His Mother, of which He was the motive and pattern.

The intercession of St. Joseph is universally invoked for the preservation of chastity, and never in vain. Joined to the

purest of women, by virginal nuptials, what man ever knew the fullness of purity as did Joseph of Nazareth, that one only man worthy to be the spouse of Mary ever Virgin? Père Louis Lallemant had such a veneration for him as the husband of the virgin Mother, that he not only invoked and praised him continually, but when he came to die he begged that a little statue of the saint might be placed in his coffin and buried with him (*Spiritual Doctrine*, p. 18).

When our chastity is so motived as to be another name for the love of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, it is a virtue perfect in its kind; it is one with the personal purity of Christ by holy concomitance. The Christian's life is thus made an offering of chastity to God, a sacrificial offering in which the victim is wholly consumed in token of the sovereign purity of the God-man. His bearing and conversation is recognized as a "sacrifice to God for an odor of sweetness" (Eph. v. 2), made one with the offering of Jesus on Calvary. The least knowledge of mankind shows the need of this in the midst of a world besotted with lust. Every day proves its efficacy in the influence of a celibate priesthood, of innumerable convents of women pure as angels, and also in the holy influence of Catholic family life everywhere. At this wondrous spectacle of superhuman chastity the very unbelievers exclaim with the Wise Man: "O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory" (Wisdom. iv. 1).

How great was the purity of God's saints. Many of the martyrs were feeble women, who shed their life's blood not only for the religion of Christ, but also for its chastity. The Church proclaims them martyrs by a twofold title, holy faith and holy purity. In later ages, in every age, in our own time, all nobler characters have felt the spell of this virtue, and, under the leadership of the holy celibate priesthood, have practised it in every state of life. It is said that St. Dominic's hands gave out a delicious perfume, which instilled thoughts of purity into the hearts of his companions. May not every Christian, each in his own degree and measure, be gifted in like manner? not miraculously, indeed,



yet as he works and rests, as he converses and listens, a fragrance of purity may encircle him, breathed out from a stainless spirit. Every Catholic should be a living protest against unchastity—that much at least. In works, words, and manners he should exhibit the glory of a clean life.

In conferring the order of priesthood, the bishop says to the young levite: "May the fragrance of thy life be the delight of the Church of Christ (*sit odor vitæ tuæ, delectamentum Ecclesiæ Christi*)."

What fragrance so sweet in a community as that of Catholic purity? Whether it be of priests and sisters, who are dedicated in a special manner to this virtue, or the noble self-restraint of our laity, chastity is the boast of the Church of Christ. If the task be hard—the curbing of a radically sensual nature—the help is divine, and given in many ways. Especially is purity safeguarded by the most pure Body and Blood of Christ received often in communion. O Body of Christ, grant me a chaste life; O Blood of Christ, wash me clean; O Heart of Christ, Whose flame of love is such a power of chastity, burn me in Thy fire! Then, too, there is always safety and comfort in the most chaste heart of Mary Immaculate, which beats with a mother's love for us, whether in the storm or stress of temptation, or the jubilant hours of victory.

In the Canon of the Mass just after the Consecration, the priest makes the sign of the cross over the sacred elements three times, with this triple invocation: "*Hostiam puram, hostiam sanctam, hostiam immaculatam.*" So the triple cross of chastity must be made upon a soul offered in union with Christ, "for an offering of most sweet savor to the Lord" (NUM. xv. 10), an oblation "most pure, most holy, most unspotted." My poor body as well as my wayward soul must be riveted to Jesus at my every Mass and communion by the three golden crosses of chastity. In return, as He loves His own chastity, so does He love mine, and I must love this virtue in myself as I love it in Him. My God, how severe a test! My chastity should be a form of His own, to be worshipped with a reverence awesome and humble.

After death I must be able to say to the demons and the damned: "Which of you can convince me of sin?" (John viii. 46)—which of you can show that I have been false to my soul's spouse? I defy you! Since I plighted Him my troth, my heavenly Bridegroom has possessed me wholly: even my scruples I have washed away in bitter tears.

St. Francis de Sales says that chastity "is a timid, sensitive, distrustful virtue. A little word, a look is enough to startle it." Can anyone claim exemption from the Saint's warning? Shall my soul continue chaste, and *not* be timid, sensitive, distrustful of little words and fleeting looks? And one who happens to be set apart for the purest of human states shall he be less careful of danger? He may bless God because he is removed from some common perils, but he should bear in mind that the vice opposed to chastity is the most insidious. One might say: "I am too old for such things." Yet Solomon the wisest of kings, "when he was old, his heart was turned away by women" (3 Kings xi. 4). Neither the word, nor not even the thought of *immunity*, should enter into our calculations.

"Watch," exclaims our Savior, and this loud cry of warning He repeats over and over in one brief discourse (Matt. xxiv. 37-44), He Who loves us so well, Who knows so well our weakness. Watchfulness means a sharp eye for a distant, a hidden or a disguised enemy, for a suspicious mind about the foolishness even of friends, is very reasonable. Seclusion is one of our best safeguards. Chastity, like a hunted deer, seeks a hiding place. Recreations must be especially suspect as places of ambush for our foe. O Spirit of God, Spouse of my soul, guard my silly tongue from chaffing with persons of the other sex and from all jokes and fooleries with them. May I herein imitate blessed Job who says: "I made a covenant with my eyes, that I would not so much as think upon a virgin" (Job xxxi. 1). When tender feelings creep into my soul, towards any person, in any state of life, be Thou instantly with me, O Spirit of God, Spouse of my soul, to remind me of my plighted troth to Thee.

The rules of modesty demand exact observance. St. Ignatius says: "Regulations concerning chastity do not admit of interpretation." That is they do not admit of dispensations, either by oneself or by one's superiors. They are not elastic like other rules that may change with circumstances or persons, but are rigidly to be obeyed and blindly followed. Mechanical exactness is to be followed about remotest dangers, unguarded glances, and gestures and attitudes, expressions, even but slightly indelicate, holy anxiety about interviews and conversations and letter writing. According to the customs of holy persons, and not the feelings of the moment, or the advice or sneers of the light minded, must one be guided. Religious decorum, modest reserve, self-distrust—these expressions must crowd back such other expressions as kindness, hospitality, gentleness. Observance of the letter of the rules of modest behavior, is the only way to make sure of the observance of their spirit.

When it is whispered in one's soul: In this case charity dictates a relaxation of the strict customs of decorum, the answer must be an emphatic *No!* But he or she is a person advanced in age, and therefore we can make an exception—*No!* But this is a near relative. Is it a brother or sister? If otherwise—*No!* He or she is a friend from early childhood—*No!* But may not exception be made in favor of so holy a person? *No! No relaxation whatsoever of the rules of modest behavior.* May my heavenly Spouse drive out of my soul and life all delusions of the unclean spirit. I solemnly promise God that in every case of doubt, I will decide against liberty and in favor of chaste custom. I lodge in the Sacred Heart of Jesus a promise of absolute candor with my Father confessor, in revealing and describing all happenings that have alarmed my conscience. Unchastity lurks in ambush, and its home is very secret: once discovered it is overcome. My Savior bids me keep my lamp trimmed, full of oil and brightly burning. Do men light lamps to guide them at noonday (Matt. xxv. 1-13)? Our Savior knows that our wrestling is with the prince of darkness (Eph. vi. 12).

A mosquito spreads malaria, and a fly typhoid, both are ugly and disagreeable. An evil thought looks beautiful, but it wings its flight to our destruction, laden with sweet perfumes, and its sting is delicious, but deadly.

Bodily austerities help to wither and starve the roots of sensuality. Blossius says: "The flower of chastity blooms amid the mortifications of the body, as a lily among thorns." An active life, well seasoned with works of religion and charity, is a safeguard. For indolence is the fruitful mother of lust, breeding evil thoughts; inducing over indulgence at table, eating and drinking between meals, thereby pampering the carnal humors of the body; favoring dangerous reading, perilous lengthening of interviews.

The ideal relation between reason and passion, is the entire tranquillity of the sexual instinct, and this is heartily to be hoped for in our earthly life. We can secure the immediate subjugation of every criminal uprising, through supernatural motives. While in the state of grace, we have a stock of chastity, but it is a jewel held "in an earthen vessel" (2 Cor. iv. 7). Among its safeguards, Cassian ranks obedience first, such obedience as results from humility and self-distrust; a military obedience, not questioning, but unquestioning. Disobedient curiosity was the first step of mother Eve towards slavery to Satan. The sentinel who sleeps on his post is liable to the death penalty, so also the careless Christian. I had rather be called a prude, than risk becoming a wanton. Guardedness concerns itself not only with outer companionship, but especially with the inner sensations of pleasure.

A great saint has said: "It is bad manners for a woman to look straight into a man's eyes." May we not say as much of a man looking fixedly at a woman? It is often the beginning of bad morals. The female sex yields in ordinary affairs to the stronger sex. But in matters of conscience God has established perfect equality. And, in matters touching holy modesty, the woman wields the sceptre. In the observance of decorum, the

woman is placed by God to rule the man, and it behooves her firmly to assert this right. In guarding the lily of chastity, both women and men must be willing to be scratched by the thorns of evil criticism, meek self-distrust making the decision, rather than deference to irresponsible advisers. St. Ambrose says: "Do you wish to be chaste? Be humble. Very chaste? Be very humble." Excessive caution is the only reasonable caution in these cases. The most trivial precaution must never be neglected, if only out of blind reverence for established rules. This stern self-discipline is not difficult, when aided by grace at every turn; it is natural to a modest soul, nay, needful as a preparation for the scrutiny of the living God in the Sacrament of Penance. A sensitive conscience is the only peaceful one. Do I feel unrest about what has happened?—about the joy I felt when some one came to see me, or when I received a certain letter?—at certain tender recollections? Do I feel uneasy at my shame in asking a certain permission? That unrest, that uneasiness, is the protest of the Holy Ghost, my soul's divine Spouse. For He is a most jealous Spouse; and I must confide the whole matter to Jesus in the tabernacle and also to my Father confessor, so that every attachment to persons of the other sex may be divinely scrutinized and cleansed. In times of unruly emotion, my instant refuge shall be the name of Jesus, the invocation of Mary and of Joseph. "O Jesus," exclaims St. Teresa, "all our evils come from not fixing our eyes on Thee."



## XXIX.

### POVERTY.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"  
(Matt. v. 3).

POVERTY in this life, if it be of the spiritual kind, is blessed with the riches of the life to come. It has a sordid appearance; but there is an heavenly spirit in it. The privation of certain outward things, whether compulsory, in case of the actual poor, or voluntary, in case of others, holds a high place in God's ways of sanctifying souls, and praise of it was chosen by our Master as the beginning of His greatest discourse, the Sermon on the Mount. It behooves us to study well what our Lord means by the words, "poor in spirit," since they bespeak a condition meriting eternal happiness.

Certain classes among us are our Lord's favorites, and one of these is made up of the poor, of persons who do not get enough to eat, whose lodging is miserable, whose clothing is scanty, who see their little children suffering want. God loves these poor sufferers with special ardor. His divine Son chose their state of life in preference to one of ease. His Blessed Mother was too poor to have a decent place for her Child's birth at Bethlehem. They had a home, indeed, at Nazareth, but a very humble one, where they shared the lot of those who toil. When Christ began to convert the world by His preaching and His miracles, He said of Himself: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His Head" (Matt. viii. 20). And if He suffered poverty in life, what shall we say of His total and absolute want at His hour of death on Calvary? Yet He was the Creator and Owner of all things. Now we must join Him in His love of poverty.

To be detached interiorly from all material comforts for His sake, is to be poor in spirit.

Christian poverty, as a spiritual state, is closely united with practical Christian charity, which is thus formulated by St. John the Baptist: "He that hath two coats, let him give to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do in like manner" (Luke iii. 11). Every Christian must, therefore, carefully divide his belongings into two parts, necessities and superfluities. The latter part he, for the love of God, devotes to the poor. Thus poverty of spirit generates the lovely virtue of generosity as a plain duty. How admirable is the well-to-do Christian who thinks more of *tuum* than of *meum* in the enjoyment of his means. Everyone blesses a liberal-handed man, doing more reverence to himself than to his money, bearing out the Holy Ghost's teaching: "A man shall be more precious than gold, yea a man than the finest gold" (Is. xiii. 12).

"The greater the greed of men for gold, the more do they admire those who have the courage to despise it," exclaims a devout writer. There never was an age so venal as not to worship honesty, not so covetous as not to admire generosity. Never was a man so stupidly rich as not to appreciate the dignity of generosity. That most venerable of public or private characters, a wealthy man fond of the poor, keeping their company, giving all to them, is universally respected. How soon such a one, especially if he be a priest or a public official, becomes the common depositary of the charity of the people. Every well-to-do man is nowadays likely to be an object of hatred to the wilder sort of agitators for social equality. But he is immune from their attacks, if he can say what St. Basil said to his persecutors: "If you rob me, you rob the poor." True of men and officials, this is doubly true of religious corporations, dioceses and others. We have adverted to the obligation of helping the poor. For as long as anyone lacks enough food—and there are always many such—some part of your food is due and owing to them, and you may say the same of

all the other necessities of life. Give generously, do it at once, and keep on doing it. Give for the love of our "Lord Jesus Christ, Who being rich, became poor for your sakes, that through His poverty you might be rich" (2 Cor. viii. 9). Remember that at the head of the innumerable masses of poor people, stands your Savior begging alms for them as the first among them; and, if we may so say, every penny that you give them passes through His hands first, which are then raised to bless the giver. He "is rich in mercy" (Eph. ii. 4), to all who are merciful with their riches, be their wealth reckoned in the banker's hundreds of thousands, or in the workingman's scanty earnings.

Actual privation borne for Christ's sake is a common school of perfection, *the* common one. Yet one may be rich in money and lands, and truly poor in spirit. St. Francis Borgia, St. Charles Borromeo, and many kingly saints have been inundated with riches; yet this only made them the more holy, not by the use of these dangerous things, but by the continual opportunity offered of renouncing them and giving them away. If they had been richer, they (strange thing to say) would have been holier; their disengagement of heart would have been more widely extended, their charities multiplied. The rich prelate, Charles Borromeo, gave away his vast estates with the same sense of non-ownership as the peasant priest, Vincent de Paul, dispensed the gold of his rich patrons. The Wise Man tells us: "Some distribute their own goods and grow richer; others take away what is not their own, and are always in want" (Prov. xi. 24). Religion and detachment go together, if one's motive is to train with Him Who in simplicity of life shamed the birds and beasts: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head" (Matt. viii. 20). Our Master's poverty in spirit was not divided from poverty in fact.

Nor should ours be over spiritualized. It behooves us to be poor in spirit, not only by helping, but also by deeply sym-

pathizing with those who are poor in fact. One can hardly profess to love Christ, because He was for our sakes a poor Man, without loving poor men. To have the spirit of detachment from earthly things and at the same time to be glad of their actual abundance in our daily life, is to be a hypocrite. If you love Christ's poverty, love His poor. Welcome them to your home, visit them in their own homes. Palliate their faults. Weep with them, if you have the grace, in their miseries. "Converse willingly with the poor," says St. Francis de Sales, "be pleased to have them near you in the church, in the streets, and elsewhere. Feel poor as you converse with them; speak to them as their companions" (*Devout Life*, III., ch. xv.).

What are one's feelings when God attracts him to evangelical poverty? Mother Frances Shervier tells us, describing her own emotions: "Scarcely had I heard, during instruction at school, that our dear Savior had a special love for the poor, and had Himself become lowly and poor for our sake, than I felt impelled to a great love for the poor, and *I was grieved that I did not belong to their number*. I began to associate with a girl amongst us whom we considered poor, and I gave her my friendship. I also felt by divine grace impelled to offer up all temporal things to God, and asked Him to take away from me all I possessed, amongst other things those articles of dress which pleased me most." Grief for not being a member of God's favorite people, the poor—that is a sign of holiness. It was conspicuously so in this case, for Mother Shervier, who lived in the latter half of the past century, besides her personal and life-long devotedness to the poor, founded a society of Franciscan Sisters for conducting free hospitals. She introduced her Sisters into our country, where they are known and revered far and wide, and held in benediction by many thousands of the sick poor for their unaffected preference for penniless and outcast sufferers.

We are well clothed and lodged and abundantly fed. Nor do I advocate such a change from this condition as would be

inconsistent with God's purpose in our vocation. But this must be realized: no one can escape being hurt by the good things of this life who does not mingle with their enjoyment bitter thoughts of the privations of the poor. It is related of St. Elizabeth of Hungary: "From her very infancy she had never been able to bear the sight of a poor person without her heart being pierced with the sharpest grief." Such sentiments inspired by heaven, are the making of saints, be they kings or peasants, laymen, priests, or order-men.

The poverty of the Infant God at His birth is a divine lesson in this virtue. Comfort He had none, as to place or attendance, or circumstance. They lacked money, that little company in the stable of Bethlehem, they were poor. Son of the Most High as Jesus was, His Mother and Joseph had but a little hoard of money. Every penny had been earned hard, and must be pinched before spending. But they were rich with heavenly treasures. Rich in wisdom; rich in knowledge and love, they could equip the whole world with their hearts' surplus. But when it came to money, a few small coins were all their store. O Jesus, teach me the glory of this poor state and its holiness; let me begin with the beginning, for poverty is the alpha of Thy virtues, as it is of Thy beatitudes.

Cæsar Augustus strove for power universal, fought bloody wars to become owner of the entire world. Riches and power were his sole aim. But Jesus, Whose heart is aglow with a divine ambition to rule, gave up all to win dominion over men's souls by love alone. To conquer our pride, He stooped to the lowest humiliation. To cause us to love one another and renounce home and kindred for the sake of friend or foe, He gave up Paradise and came to live among us. To suffer want for the welfare of others—behold the imperial wisdom of the Christian state!

The angel said to the shepherds: "This day is born to you a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord, in the City of David. And this shall be a sign unto you. . . . . You shall find the Infant wrap-



ped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger" (Luke ii. 11, 12). The sign of all power from that day to this, the sign of all riches, is a royal Mother in a stable, an Heir rich enough to ransom all mankind out of bondage, Himself too poor to buy a night's lodging. A spectacle that has entranced the nobler kind of men in every age.

St. Teresa admonishes her nuns that if they lack disinterestedness they "are deceiving the world," and that if having embraced poverty, they are not poor in spirit, but only in externals, their conscience should prick them, since then they become like miserly "rich people asking for alms" (*Way of Perfection*, Stanbrook, ch. ii., 2). Community rule limits one to a moderate and even frugal use of temporal goods by law, but its spirit enjoins such a daily life as causes one to actually feel need. If a state of poverty does not involve personal want, where is the poverty? Temperance yes, but temperance is not an evangelical counsel. Obedience to the letter of the rule secures frugality, economy. Obedience to its letter and spirit adds poverty. A miser practises thrift in various ways; thrift becomes holy poverty when practised by a Christian in union with the poor Man of Calvary. Canonical poverty takes us from solicitude about temporal goods, in order that we may labor the more freely for spiritual goods both for ourselves and our neighbor. But this peace and security is in itself not poverty at all, but just the reverse, being what is commercially known as insurance. Unless it is wholly rooted in confidence in God, as the community's procurator, it is a business advantage, and not a religious one. Sometimes community life is but the quiescence of a comfortably if frugally provided man, whose moderate desires are all supplied as part of his "rights." Hence the constant reiteration in Rules and Constitutions that the members must live, and realize that they live, upon the charity of the faithful; hence the stern insistence on this essential truth in the conferences of the annual Retreats.

One who is called to live in our Savior's company, must bear in mind that, whereas His gift to us is "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. iii. 8), of Himself He said by the Prophet: "I am poor and in labors from my youth" (Ps. lxxxvii. 16). Some degree or quality of real want was never absent from Him, Whose company is our dearest privilege—the extreme of penury marking His life's entry and close, born miserably in a stable, dying naked on a cross. "When I saw Christ on the cross," exclaims St. Teresa, "so poor and destitute, I could not bear to be rich, and I implored Him with tears so to order matters that I might be poor as He was" (*Life*, ch. xxxv., 4). Why should any true imitator of Jesus seek to prosper in a world in which his Master chose to live in want and die an outcast? When and where did the Patriarch Jacob wrestle with an angel, beholding the ladder reaching from earth to heaven, "the angels of God ascending and descending by it, and the Lord leaning upon it?" (Gen. xxviii. 12, 13.) It was when his bed was the bare ground, and a rock was his pillow. When did King David fall away from God? When he was filled with riches. To be safe is to be poor in spirit, holding riches in contempt—to be both safe and innocent. This spirit of poverty it is that makes one rich in spirit.

A poor Dominican friar, Blessed Henry Suso, when asked what his thoughts were while he sang "*Sursum Corda*—Lift up your hearts"—in the preface of holy Mass, answered: "My heart is stirred and set on fire with the contemplation of my entire being, my whole soul, my body, my forces, and my powers, and round about me are gathered all the creatures with which the all-powerful God has peopled the heavens, the earth, and the elements; the angels of heaven, the beasts of the forests, the fishes in the waters, the plants of the earth, the sands of the sea, the atoms floating in the sunshine, the flakes of snow, the drops of rain, and the pearls of dew. I think how all creatures, even to the most remote extremities of the world, obey God and contribute what they can to that mysterious harmony which goes up with-

out ceasing to praise and bless the Creator. I then fancy myself in the midst of this concert as choirmaster; I devote all my faculties to beat time; with the most energetic movements of my heart I invite them, I excite them to sing most joyously with me, '*Sursum Corda*—Lift up your hearts.' We have lifted them up to the Lord; let us give thanks a thousand times to the Lord our God." This man in his poverty was master of the universe, and could command the very inhabitants of heaven to worship God with him.

Who is more the owner of my painting: I who have purchased it, and stand and gawk at it, and clap my money bags; or the out-at-elbow artist who looks into heaven through it? Who is real Lord of the universe, but Jesus the Son of God, Who has never a rood of land nor a dollar of money, and yet Who imparts such a "spirit" to those who practise gospel poverty, that they are "as needy, yet enriching many; as having nothing, yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. vi. 10).

Holy poverty is closely related to holy wisdom. It is taught by the Spirit of God as follows: "And if riches be desired in life, what is richer than wisdom which maketh all things?" (Wisd. viii. 5.) Certainly this is not human wisdom—that a man gains more by losing than by keeping the wealth of this world. Yet St. Paul bids us: "Remember the word of the Lord Jesus how He said: It is a more blessed thing to give than to receive" (Acts xx. 35). Even among the better sort of unchristian men, there is no lack of perception of the elevation of spirit due to disinterestedness. St. Justin Martyr, whilst yet a pagan, had great love of wisdom. He once engaged the services of a teacher of philosophy, but when his teacher questioned him about the amount of his salary, Justin concluded he was no philosopher and left him. Now if philosophy and money are so ill-sorted, what shall we say of Christian perfection and money? Be careful; many a soul longing for God's truth is hindered by the scandalous money getting of its teachers.

St. Francis de Sales cherished this motto: "It is better to

desire little than to possess much." Do you think: do you suppose that when the Blessed Virgin saw her Child so poorly clad, so rudely lodged, and suffering from the cold—do you suppose she said to herself: I wish we were rich? The late Bishop Ullathorne said that "no undertaking for God's honor was of any worth unless begun in a garret or in a cellar." Did not the Son of God teach this wisdom by beginning our salvation in a stable? This state of life, namely, the want of all luxuries, even of some things usually deemed necessary, the lack of provision for the future, the plain evidence of all concerned that one is almost penniless, the constant struggle even for commonest conveniences—in a word the state of actual poverty is despised by many, and hated and feared by nearly the whole world. Is this wise? Jesus Christ loved that state deeply; He embraced it; He deepened its dark sorrows; He undertakes to teach its wisdom to His favorites, both by counsel and example evermore.

Holy poverty's reward is thus promised by our Savior: "Every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting" (Matt. xix. 29). The Apostles to whom our Savior was speaking, had given up nets and boats to follow Him in poverty, and they received graces more precious than can be described. They gave up "their father Zebedee," and in return they received their Master's Father as their own in a peculiarly intimate relationship. St. Bernard says: "Has not he received a hundredfold of everything who is filled with the Holy Ghost, and bears Jesus Christ in his bosom?" Nor must we wait till we are perfectly disengaged from this world's good things before we receive our reward and enjoy the good things of heaven. Once we begin to pay down ever so little earnest money, be it nothing more than admiration and praise of Christ's poverty, He on His part fills the coffers of our mind with heavenly consolation. We follow Him little by little, while He loves us without stint from the beginning. Hardly any virtue is more capable of progress and

development than the spirit of detachment. Love Jesus personally, and you will soon begin to love His meager way of using the things of this world. Love His choice for the poor as the people of His own state of life, in preference to those who are in easy circumstances, and presently your mind will reason out His motives; or rather His spirit will lead your thoughts pitifully to succor the poor.

O how rich is he whose only possession is the Lord of all! When one is master of the Son of God's love, and that by divine right, he knows what wealth of joy really means. It is the literal realization of the Psalmist's claim: "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance" (Ps. xv. 5).

The privilege of belonging to Christ, and of owning Christ, is granted to those who enter the ranks of His poor as far as their state of life will permit. For Christ's sake, live, act, travel, recreate, according to the ways of men in straitened circumstances. Follow the examples of the saints, and take the Gospel maxims seriously. Emulate the more perfect Christians of your acquaintance. Renew often your acceptance of the Lord, and of His condition of life, especially at holy Mass and Communion.



### XXX.

#### PURITY OF HEART.

"Keep your eyes well fixed on your unruly inclinations to uproot them. Never be surprised to find yourself wretched, and loaded with evil humors. Treat your heart with a great desire of perfecting it. Have an indefatigable care to put it right when it stumbles" (*St. Francis de Sales*, Letter xlviii., Mackey Edition).

SOME years ago we heard the late Jesuit Father Pardow say of the Founder of his Order: "By the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius established his religious family; but by his *Spiritual Exercises* he became the novice master of the human race."

One easily pardons the extravagance of such praise in the mouth of a close disciple of St. Ignatius, for the Saint's marvelous system of meditating on heavenly things known as his *Exercises*, forms the best economics of holy thinking ever vouchsafed to devout souls.

We refer to this because we are going to consider purification of heart, which is the concentration of the soul upon its defects as well as upon its purposes in life; and because we wish to quote a canon of mental prayer laid down in the preliminary directions of the *Exercises*: "Before all the contemplations and meditations, preparatory prayer must always be the same, without any alteration. That preparatory prayer is that I should ask our Lord God for grace that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be ordained purely to the service and praise of His divine Majesty." What is this but an application to prayerful method of the Beatitude, "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God?" (Matt. v. 8.) This far-famed rubric of meditation is nothing else than a prayer for purity of heart. Distinguish between what is wholly and what is partially given to God, and

you will draw the line between perfection and imperfection. Do it devoutly, systematically, and the human side of spiritual progress is cared for; God's part will not be lacking. To quote from another and a very great disciple of St. Ignatius, purity of heart "is that nudity of spirit which disposes us to be fully possessed by God" (Lallemant).

Hardly any virtue has so many definitions, not a few of them paraphrases: Purity of conscience; rectitude of intention; reference of all to God; universality of supernatural motives; continual exclusion of self-interest, vainglory, pleasure, and aversion. It is the disengagement of the affections from all things to concentrate them upon God. Purity of heart is whole heartedness with God.

For simplification of spiritual conduct, purity of heart holds high place. It is certain that if a soul can say: "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready" (Ps. cvii. 2), God will take possession of it. Prepare your soul, that is your part; root out the weeds and the Lord will plant the good grain, for "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man" (Matt. xiii. 37). Our only real initiative in a devout career is exterminating imperfections. Perfect acts are directly inspired by God, or indirectly insinuated by the counsel and example of brethren, enforced by superiors or exacted by His providences. Mark well your part in the divine husbandry; strictly speaking, it is only weeding.

St. Felix, of Cantelicio, was for forty years the begging brother of a Capuchin convent, and was afoot many hours daily in his quest for food. He was once asked: "How can you remain recollected in divine things amid the many distractions of such an occupation?" He answered: "Why, brother, every creature of the world will raise our hearts to God, if we look on it with a good eye." In truth it is not the object that causes distraction, but the eye that beholds it. "The light of thy body is thy eye. If thy eye be single, thy whole body will be lightsome. But if thy eye be evil, thy whole body will be darksome" (Matt. vi. 22, 23). Purity of heart is, therefore, clearness of spiritual eyesight.

The difference between good acting and purity of heart, is the difference between clean water and a clean spring of water. Doubtless the intention of a right act must have been right, but purity of heart secures right intention originally and not by special advertence—secures it for all acts. In addition to rightly ordering one's intention here and now, one may acquire an instinctive facility, by which an habitual advertence flows forth over one's entire conduct, and makes purity of heart kindred to recollection of spirit, as we have seen in the Capuchin saint.

The peculiar feature of this virtue, or rather of the type of spirituality it fosters, is in the emphasis of intention rather than of action. The question is, What do I mean? rather than: What am I doing? The practice of active virtue is restricted to God's evident will as exhibited in His plain commandments, His counsels, providences, and the imperative movements of grace. The avoidance of evil, be it petty or serious, is the main and only unrestricted external state, the doing of positive good being held more under discipline. Negative virtue and positive prayer become jointly the favorite condition, the only unrestricted one. This produces that character of mature self-control and dauntless purpose, to which in due time God entrusts His greater enterprises; while others make the noisier battle, this soul, like Napoleon's old guard, gives the decisive stroke of victory.

These spirits make much use of confession and particular examen. These well done, the positive preparations for communion need be little other than various forms or moods of devout receptivity. No wonder, then, that St. Ignatius seems to have rated his scheme of particular examens the master stroke of the *Spiritual Exercises*. A character thereby formed does not verge on the passive, or the do-nothing type, but rather upon the deliberative type. Such spirits are moved by God insensibly into the possession of opportunities, or are found quietly dominating ordinary conditions without their beginnings being so much as noticed. The whole career of St. Vincent de Paul illustrates this

—at once the most quiet-minded and most energetic man of his era.

A man goes to a physician because he has sore eyes. The doctor asks many questions, and then prescribes nothing for the sore eyes. He says: You have overdone; take a rest; eat your food more slowly; avoid stimulants; slow down your nerves; no medicine like a quiet mind; I've nothing to say about your eyes, the soreness comes from the low tone of your whole system. So do the blunders and the quarrels and the despondencies of many a good soul come from overdoing. Stop and think; go about your meditations leisurely; less haste and more purpose; be temperate in using stimulating devotions; have interior house-cleanings at shorter intervals; seek to do the good that no one else is doing, but yield place readily to volunteers; pass more quickly from work to prayer than from prayer to work. Let us realize, in a word, that spiritual sore eyes and spiritual impure blood are not local but general ailments—we mean the self-conceit and the blind antipathies and the obstinate self-will of good people.

How great is the need of studying the first movements. Tastes and distastes; likes and dislikes; satisfactions and dissatisfactions—whence do they spring? This can never be known except by quiet inner scrutiny. There are no questions in all life so important as these two: In what does my heart find its repose and contentment? And: In what does my heart find its repugnances and antagonisms?

Purification comes from on high, but not directly, for the grace of heart-cleansing (allowing for rare exceptions) is a grace of patient processes rather than of sudden transformations.

There is an infinite difference between my soul and God, and yet God has destined me to know Him as really as He knows me: "I shall know even as I am known" (1 Cor. xiii. 12). Shall He, can He, refuse my prayer to know myself? Shall I not have a self-knowledge whose realism partakes of the fullness of God's own knowledge of me? Next to the privilege of the Beatific

Vision, there is no boon so priceless as the knowledge of my soul's sinfulness, knowledge full and true and experimental.

Self-introspection is not without its perils. But that form of it which seeks self-humiliation is safe. The culprit who chooses his own judge and then is condemned, is doubly condemned, is self-condemned, and easily self-amended. Self-abasement is always safe, for it is rational self-elevation. He that searches his soul to detect faults, is the only one who finds God there.

Purification of motives, reduced to a system, and having place in daily exercises of piety, fits us for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And, therefore, the Holy Spirit continually urges us to adopt some stated practice equivalent to particular examen of conscience. O Lord, I am aware that there is no virtue suited to my state of life which Thou wilt not grant me. But this good will of Thine is not without a condition, and alas! that condition is my own good will to be made fit for such graces. Do I really wish to be freed from my faults—do I positively desire it? For while I know that Thou dost urge me, yet I cannot expect Thee to force me. My one resource is to begin at some one or other defect, single it out, study its ugliness, learn to hate it, resolutely set to work to root it out. One after another I can thus go on till I exterminate all faults in as far as they are voluntary, cleanse my life and purify my heart.

If I have been a hard sinner, my return to the service of God begins by changing a sewer into an aqueduct. This is done by repentance, which changes my soul from a sink of evil to a reservoir of grace. After that my advancement in God's service consists mainly in keeping the stream of life in my soul clean from the taint of venial sin.

Purifying our intentions and sacrificing our inclinations is usually the sum total of a pious life. Whatsoever we do, be it in itself high or low in the list of good deeds, is in God's reckoning levelled upward or downward by the double gauge of intention and sacrifice. Nothing we can do of ourselves is good enough for an offering to God; but our least morsel of good will may be



a banquet of the Holy Spirit, if in all simplicity it be directed for Christ's glory. Then let me begin at the beginning and rectify my intentions; for through these, as through an aqueduct, the waters of life must flow.

Experienced directors know well the misery of that headlong zeal for progress, which ventures on high virtues before repressing, or even acknowledging, least of all exterminating, daily faults. This is like spreading paint upon green wood; when the wood dries, the painting though it be a Rembrandt, peels off. So does the unripened soul lose its early virtues, which were assumed but not assimilated. These are not, indeed, as culpable as the Pharisees, to whom the Lord said: "First make clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, that the outside may become clean" (Matt. xxiii. 26)—they are hardly culpable at all; but they are exceedingly unwise. Let them leave to obedience the choice of outward good works, and meantime look carefully to the "preparation of the heart" (Ps. x. 17), which the prophet tells us the Lord steadfastly regards. The soul that is vigilant and jealous about its own little failings, constantly following them downward to their deepest roots, is destined to the great things of virtue—and it is the only soul that shall be so favored. Of course, this means an aggressive spirit of self-purification; for one may have a low opinion of self yet rest contented, which does not betoken purification, but degeneracy. The promise of the Holy Ghost is to the earnest character: "If thou be diligent, thy harvest shall come as a fountain" (Prov. vi. 11).

Few appreciate that just keeping the Commandments may be made a standard of high perfection. St. Paul instructs Timothy that "the end of the commandment is charity, from a pure heart and a good conscience, and unfeigned faith" (1 Tim. i. 5). As the elementary truth is always the most precious, so the rudimentary practice of religion is always the most essential, and the gift of perfect charity waits on keeping the Commandments, if it be done so strictly that, at last, conscience remains habitually unsullied.

"Unfeigned faith" is restful and contented only in a heart purified of the littlest evil. To this exhortation to his favorite, St. Paul returns again and over again, and with much vehemence, in the same epistle (1 Tim. vi. 13, 14): "I charge thee before God, Who quickeneth all things, and before Jesus Christ, Who gave testimony under Pontius Pilate, a good confession, that thou keep the commandment without spot." Keep, then, the Commandments of God in the spirit of the counsels of Christ Crucified. Once God is (so to speak) assured of this purpose within us, well established and practically working, He is content; for He knows that we have little besides to offer Him.

The strength of temptation is, to a loyal heart, the measure of the force of resistance. Purity of intention is a form of vigilance; the nearness of danger, but develops the consciousness of the nearness of divine help. It is not otherwise with our struggles against less obtrusive, but equally perilous evils. These are the world, with its ever-encroaching company of minimizers and secularists; the flesh, of which Father Thomas of Jesus says: "I live in the arms of a formidable enemy" (*Sufferings of Jesus*, vi.); the evil spirit, who plays both of these against us, with the addition of his own hatred and cunning. In the warfare against this unholy alliance, how free and intrepid is the soul, and how glorious its victories when it fights inspired with absolute hatred of evil in all its grades. Such a spirit is needed for attaining to purity of heart. "Awake, ye just, and sin not" (1 Cor. xv. 34) is the war cry of our life: awake, watch, be quit of sin, stand at swords' points with the tempter. Every one of us must at every moment be ready to challenge the demons in our Master's words to His enemies: "Which of you shall convince me of sin?" (John viii. 46.)

With the better class of souls it is the desire of pleasing men that divides the heart from God, according to St. Paul's words: "Do I seek to please men? If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. i. 10). With the grosser spirits, it is the love of an easy life. The latter misery betrays its own

shamefulness, while pleasing men to one's own hurt is a vice well disguised. For next to pleasing God there is no higher virtue than making men happy, but it must be done for their spiritual good. St. Veronica of Milan was a woman of an humble class in life, and with all her efforts was not able to read. The Blessed Virgin at last appeared to her, and told her that it was enough that she learn three letters. The first was to be the purity of her affections, placing them on God alone, loving no creature but in Him and for Him. The second was never to murmur at the sins of others, but to bear with sinners humbly and to pray for them. The third letter of this short but all-sufficing alphabet, was the setting apart of some time every day for meditation on the Passion of Christ. Under the first letter we may group all of the purifying processes of our spirituality, beginning with the Sacrament of Penance; under the second, the concentration of all that is needed for peace and mutual affection with our neighbor; under the third, the cultivation of simplicity and uprightness of intention through the divine influence of the sacraments, especially the participation in Christ's Passion in holy Mass and Communion. And in all this our resolute purpose need not, must not, degenerate into excess of energy, for, as St. Francis de Sales teaches, "This is the height of virtue, to correct immoderation moderately" (*Letters to Persons in the World*, Mackey, p. 184).

We speak of refinement of character, as opposed to coarseness. It means sensitiveness to our little defects of manner and vulgarisms of taste, making much of little proprieties, striving to superfine the kindness of our bearing towards others. This is easily applied to the spiritual life. It is, for example, true refinement of soul to be instinctively conscious of a slight slovenliness in our spiritual exercises. Refinement in the natural order is opposed to low tastes; in the supernatural order, to "low views" of the standard of virtue generally, or of the virtues of one's calling in particular. A refined lady or gentleman dislikes what is unbecoming their station; a refined Christian

has a decided aversion to whatever seems in the least unworthy a follower of Christ. Such a one will, for instance, gladly take any low place in the order of personal precedence. But in standards of virtue, in ambition to be holy, he will be second to none. In all efforts to cleanse our lives of defect, regard must be had to the quality of the evil to be dealt with—little in bulk, it may be great in germ power.

St. Anthony of the desert, when he began a holy life, would watch the different hermits, and ask himself why could not he practise this or that virtue he admired in them, and straightway he would undertake it; and St. Ignatius says that he also did the same in his earlier years. To acquire virtue thus is, perhaps, above our strength. But we can root out vices by that method. When I see a fault in another, instead of sitting in judgment on him, I may better follow the advice of à Kempis, and say interiorly: "Beware lest thou do the like thyself."

One word of caution. All those exercises of religion which occupy us with our sins and their causes have for their main—nay, their only—purpose the acquiring of virtue. We should not fear vices as much as we love virtues, is the saying of a great saint. That caveat well heeded, we cannot be too diligent in our examens or too energetic in our purgations. "The tepid man," writes Blessed John of Avila, "is a sluggard who prefers dying of hunger to working for his bread." The principal and everyday help that God affords us, and that which is most confidently to be relied on, is the grace to correct our faults, to attain purity of heart.

## XXXI.

### THE WORTH OF THE COMMONPLACE.

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, that minter of both the gold and copper coin of spiritual commerce, calls attention (*Devout Life*, III., xxxv.) to the double perfection of the Valiant Woman of the Book of Proverbs: "She hath put forth her hands," he quotes, "to strong things;" that is, to things high, generous, and important, and yet she disdaineth not to "take hold of the spindle" (Prov. xxxi. 19). Never forget the distaff and the spindle, the Saint insists, even if you are gifted to embroider tapestry of silk and gold. Then he utters one of his immortal maxims: "Take care to practise these low and humble virtues, which grow like flowers at the foot of the cross."

Adopting his own artless style of comparison, we notice that the biggest of animals, the whale, feeds on the littlest fishes in the sea. As to ourselves, however big may be the quantity of our food, it must be pulverized in our mouths before going to the stomach for digestion; we live on many atoms rather than on much bulk of nutriment.

So does the little-by-little process of virtue feed our thoughts unto perfection. The rule admits only of rare exceptions, such as miraculous conversions. Big acts of virtue, to be sure, sooner or later will be required of us—only to be performed after minute, long-drawn-out preparation. Therefore meantime, right now, and as a current condition, God requires the little acts. How can a man who repines at a headache gladly accept God's fiat of death? Can one who is content to be commonly a pigmy be relied on to be occasionally a giant?

Some of us are like those public speakers who emphasize the chief words and slur over the little ones of their discourse. If you would be great, make little actions a training school for



doing great ones. After all, perfection as a workaday grace, is a current force and an ordinary condition of love; perfection is a continuous state and a well-connected series of loving mental activities. Outwardly this state of soul must offer in God's sight the soul's correspondence with the constantly renewed opportunities of virtue. These are not great but little occasions.

Herein is the divine worth of the commonplace. For in regard to the greater calls of God, one wisely hesitates and takes time, prays for light, seeks counsel. But there are no such rubrics for the morning and evening sacrifice of self-denial in little things, the instinctive preference of another's comfort to one's own, the automatic restraint of an irascible temper, all for the love of Jesus Crucified.

Perhaps no teaching of our Redeemer is more amazing than this: "For whosoever shall give you to drink a cup of water in My name, because you belong to Christ; amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (Mark ix. 40). The motive "because you belong to Christ" is the bridge between so cheap a gift as a cup of water and so glorious a destiny as the beatific vision.

As hot a fire is needed to reduce a single pound of iron ore as a thousand tons. As divine a motive is needed to make a man talk gently to his peevish wife as to respond to the call of martyrdom. In all orders of life the intensive outranks the extensive, but in none so essentially as in the spiritual life.

It is not the money value of the threads of gold and silver and silk and wool (to revert to a previous illustration), that makes a piece of tapestry precious. And as the coloring and the grouping of the tapestry are its only real excellence, so is the soul's motive the only real excellence of any act—a great act with a little motive is dwarfed into insignificance, a little one with the great motive of "you belong to Christ" is given an extra "weight of glory," be it no more than a cup of water, or a kindly glance into the face of an angry man. This doctrine, as unquestioned as Gospel truth can make it, is a great comfort to those whose

deepest searchings of consciousness are like the jingling of nickels and pennies in a poor man's pocket. The housemaid scrubs floors, and the doctor of divinity lectures on the Trinity; the difference is all in favor of the professor as to the matter, but as to personal merit in these employments, it may easily be reversed by the comparison of motive.

As a little signet ring can bind a whole kingdom, because it is worn on the king's finger, so a little hand's turn of gratitude for Christ's sake can win entrance to the kingdom of heaven. Truthfulness as absolute in little things as in great, delicate shadings of kindness in conversation, cold shivers of sensitiveness to the divine honor in examens of conscience, rigidity of observance of a devout rule of life—behold perfection as far as it is a practical method. It is a comfort to know that God concerns Himself with *all* means of grace, great and little. To many the disenchantments wrought by a second, perhaps a very late conversion, will be the tardy discovery that bigness is not greatness in spiritual things.

After our Savior fed several thousands of men in the wilderness by a wondrous miracle, He said to His disciples: "Gather up the fragments that remain, lest they be lost. They gathered up, therefore, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments" (John vi. 12, 13). Ask these Apostles—mark you, they were men destined to conquer the whole world to Christ—what was their part in the miracle? Gathering up fragments, they answer proudly; saving pieces of fish and bread that were left over. An honorable part, a laudable coöperation. It was all their Master asked of them; and this He even commanded. What a lesson! If He values the little things of His kitchen and dining-room, so does He value yet more the little things of His altar rail and confessional, our bedside prayers and our little aspirations, even our velleities and fleeting desires. Nay, the feeble yearnings of a cowardly nature are not unregarded. "The Lord hath heard the desire of the poor; Thy ear hath heard the preparation of their heart" (Ps. ix. 17).

The Lord did not say: Gather up the fragments and you will show by their amount the greatness of My miracle. No; but "lest they be lost." The petty virtue of economy was thus lifted unto the high throne of Gospel poverty. An enormous miracle associated with a wee little virtue. We are long in learning that there is such a thing as giving up all to Christ, and then wasting many baskets full of useful fragments. The broken victuals are as much Christ's virtues as the rich feastings of heroic love.

"What do you do with all these coppers?" a pastor was once asked as he was seen laboriously counting his penny collection. "The bank is glad to get them," he answered, "and deals them out to grocerymen and confectioners; and I am glad to deposit them. I could hardly get along without them." The gathering of one sou a week from millions of poor Catholics, supports the vast army of our missionaries to the heathen all around the globe.

The single miracle of Christ for which Mary is responsible—as far as the written record goes—was the relief of the embarrassment of the Galilean bridal couple. A petty affair, was it not, to one like her, who is the Queen of all angels and men (John ii.). And consider the life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph at Nazareth. Every day, twice, at least, Mary swept and dusted; she always saved odds and ends of food. She fed chickens and doves, darned and stitched, and constantly "took hold of the spindle."

Jesus, meanwhile, was first an apprentice and then a partner, finally the sole workman in a country carpenter shop. All these thirty years of littleness was His training—humanly speaking—to teach the Apostles how to discourse upon "the wonderful works of God" (Acts ii. 11). None more wonderful than the humble works of Jesus at Nazareth for thirty years.

Consider that it takes as much power to create a grain of sand as the sun in heaven. And consider this: whosoever is careful about the little things of God, will necessarily value great ones with holiest reverence; but not (necessarily) *vice versa*. Therefore says the Wise Man: "He that feareth God, neglecteth nothing" (Eccles. vii. 19).

Notice what Jesus did when He raised to life the dead daughter of Jairus (Mark v.). They were also astonished at seeing the corpse rise up and walk, that they forgot to care for her wants. Not so Jesus. He immediately commanded that some food should be given her. Raising the dead to life did not hinder His care for her comfort: here is a majesty of love in which the great does not hinder the little.

He learned all this (as we may say) in the divine school of His Father; for He tells us that by Him all the hairs of our head are numbered (Matt. x. 30); that He counts the little sparrows that fall from the housetop; and safeguards even the iotas and jots and tittles of His law, till all be fulfilled (Matt. v. 18). He learned this holy littleness, as we have seen, from His Mother; and from St. Joseph, saving the little pieces of board after the day's work, hunting for a lost nail, bringing in the small strips and shavings to Mary to kindle the hearth fire. Here it was—oh, what a divine truth!—that Jesus was made accustomed to say to His disciples: "Gather up the fragments" for the love of God; do not be wasteful of the least trifling good; bear in mind that two mites may mark the whole merit of a distinguished contributor to the divine treasury of virtue (Luke xxi. 3). Like the sweepings of a goldsmith's shop, the waste and leavings of a soul working for God form a precious spiritual asset.

Herein we note the relation of natural virtues to their divine counterparts, the supernatural ones: the natural minister to the supernatural. For example, kindness is handmaid to charity and frugality to holy poverty. Frugality is a tender to poverty. A great battleship goes to sea accompanied by a tender, an unarmed ship full of supplies and ammunition. She is not a warship, yet she is necessary for offering battle; a battleship dare not risk an engagement without such a consort. So frugality is not in itself a Christian virtue, but it carries along holy poverty's supplies and ammunition. As Nazareth was the school of Calvary, so the household is the school of the monastery. The



widow's mites were saved by commonplace frugality and invested by divine charity. Alas for the home in which little economies are despised, or for the soul in which little devotional practices are ridiculed.

This applies with special force to the virtue of chastity, which, as a divine trait, is so well served by the natural trait of modesty. We are familiar with the frequent case of converts, whose cleanliness of soul plainly has won for them the nuptials of the Lamb in the grace of conversion to the true faith. Their native instinct of sexual refinement they cherished for its own sake, and God now endows them with the chastity of "the angels of God in heaven" (Matt. xxii. 30). Even of the licentious man, who is yet ashamed of himself and manages to keep up appearances, we may cherish hope; his bad practices are against his good principles, which will yet prevail. And good Christians shall have no small reward for their small purities. They fear and avoid what is not exactly unchaste, but yet not quite pure—a double meaning word, a doubtful article in a newspaper.

In old times a knight would wear his lady's glove in his helmet, or her kerchief—not her golden brooch. So we cannot have the jewels of Mary's purity, yet she makes us welcome to her clean manners and speech and looks. Of all virtues, purity is the one that has no small change for the barter of life; its pennies are golden. Purity is to be practised in the minutest particulars.

Humility and obedience gain immeasurably by attention to details. Petty observances gain a noble dignity from a noble motive. Nobility of obedience is shown by refusing interpretations and going right on to simple conformity. St. Peter Fabre, while suffering from the beginnings of a malady which proved to be his last illness, received a letter from his superior, St. Ignatius, calling him from Spain to Italy. He was urged to send word of his sickness and wait for an answer. But he replied: "One may die, but one may not disobey;" and he instantly



set out for Rome, there to quickly die. Such an heroic inspiration is not commonly vouchsafed us. But it is no different in kind from the invariable inner voice, bidding us obey cheerfully a cranky superior; to jump up promptly in response to an untimely call; to cultivate a deferential manner; and to yield sweetly to a bitter and imperious master.

We read in wonder of the marvelous things our Lord revealed to St. Teresa in an almost continuous succession of ecstasies—we never dream of such privileges for ourselves. But do we remember that one of her notable books, *The Way of Perfection*, treats principally of how to say the Our Father with attention? Supernal wisdom was never more worthily employed than in the diminutive doctorate of teaching little ones how to prattle their prayers. Our Lord did not reproach His Apostles for not watching with Him throughout the whole of that awful night before His Crucifixion; but he did complain: "What? Could you not watch one hour with Me?" (Matt. xxvi. 40.) That I can do, O Lord, once a week anyway—or I can give Thee the fraction of an hour. And I can hear Mass with decent attention; and make sure of not coming late; I can recite the Angelus; I can say my table prayers.

Consider the little things of zeal for souls. One does not lie awake thinking of sinners, and yet one may have a kindly interest in them; he can and he does help others whose calling or whose gifts make them leaders in soul saving. He cannot preach a powerful sermon, but he can manage a catechism class. He cannot lecture on God, but he can help to get an audience for some one who can. He cannot write a brilliant controversial article, but he can take a Catholic magazine; and he can lend it to his non-Catholic neighbor.

Take the case of study. It is a noble thing when one studies from purely supernatural motives, originally for God, explicitly so and only so, exclusively and always for God. Well our motives are hardly so high; saints and saintly souls do that way. But commonly one takes natural love of study and

other natural motives, ready-made, found set and fixed in nature, and these he dedicates to God. Thus if by nature we possess a thrifty habit of mind, we easily save the pennies of knowledge, and the dollars take care of themselves. Hereby we win not extensive information of divine things, but yet a detailed and integral completeness in what we do know. God's gain is in the merchantable character of our stock in trade rather than in its extent and variety; though we be but peddlers of His truth and love, we are not without a good percentage of commission.

Note that in the case of Dives and Lazarus, the rich man's fragments were the poor man's coveted feast—coveted and begged—and refused. Lazarus lay at the rich man's gate, "desiring to be filled with the crumbs that fell from his table, and no one did give unto him" (Luke xvi. 21). If Dives had but saved out of his sumptuous feasting the broken victuals for a beggar's scanty meal, it would never have been said of him: "The rich man died and was buried in hell." He was not called on to invite the beggar to his banquet hall; but he was obligated at least to give him the kitchen refuse and the table waste for which his hungry mouth watered. He was buried in hell because he would not give away the leavings of his luxury. Jesus gave His great feast to the hungry multitude, and kept for Himself and His beloved Apostles only the leavings. Dives would not even do the reverse of this. He gorged himself to death on the dainties of luxury, and despised the famishing plea of the beggar for the crumbs and sweepings of the dining-room. Many a Catholic will surely have to suffer many days in purgatory for feasting sumptuously on the good things of holy faith, forgetful of the non-Catholics at his gate, languishing for the crumbs—the pleasant words of truth, the kindly invitations to Mass and to sermons, the little books of religion, cheap little gifts that would save their immortal souls.

Fidelity to God is a permanent state only when it takes in little things for His sake with the fidelity due to Him in great things. No one was ever canonized for doing great things

with the ease of native greatness; but many a saint is embalmed in eternal memory by the divine testimony of miracles, granted for living a routine life with miraculous fervor.

The prime secret of holiness is how to do ordinary actions with extraordinary love. The obvious advantage of this doctrine, seldom known till after the chagrin of many spiritual disappointments, is that it makes the vestibule of perfection common ground for all, whether heroes or underlings. The daily life of all is the average humdrum of the commonplace. No other novitiate is open to the most gifted, nor refused to the dullest of souls. Habit makes the man, and habit depends on a constant succession of influences; but great events and heroic calls are not constantly repeated, for they are rare. Little opportunities to be good are always at hand, are naturally successive, are supernaturally distributed everywhere, and supernaturally blest. What is naturally present with us daily and hourly, God makes supernatural and providential. Habits of virtue, like many other habits, must come gradually and easily, or hardly come at all. Happy is the Christian, who, for the love of God, fixes his mind on the divine opportunities of home and business, and loses none of them for practice of virtue. Happy the Christians whose natural tendencies to good are insensibly made into supernatural habits of virtue.

It is thus that it comes to pass that one is made a true servant of God. He grows to be as avaricious of his time as a miser of his gold, because his time is literally opportunity for good, all of his time. What seems reasonable recreation to another, to him seems prodigal waste of a most precious commodity; or rather his recreations are joyful only because they are the familiar means of spiritual relaxation, or of making others happy. He carefully saves the pennies, that is the little passing moments of the day. He penuriously devotes them to occupations useful to his neighbor; or to sanctifying his own soul, whether in the quiet recollection of a religious mind, or communing with greater souls in spiritual reading.

## XXXII.

### EMPLOYMENT OF TIME.

ONCE St. John Francis Regis came home at night, having spent many hours visiting prisons and hospitals, and had forgotten his dinner. He was ready to faint with weakness. "Why did you not come home to dinner?" he was asked. "I hadn't time to think of it," was the young priest's answer. May God grant us many priests and many laymen who forget the lapse of time in their devotion to eternity. Time is best used when its hours pass by unnoticed in our absorption in doing good. The higher perfection may be defined as doing the best act for the best motive, at the best time. In a saint's life the holiness of God and the sweetness of Christ are woven into acts upon the loom of time.

The true man's plan of campaign is his method of going to God with the drift of years. But his tactics are adapted to the present moment alone, which has been rightly said to possess a sacramental holiness. Look to the present hour with greedy purpose. Commit no sins, no, not even the least venial sin, *now*, leave the past to God's mercy, the future to God's providence. Commandments, counsels, inspirations—they all form the key to the lock of the present moment. Here is the teaching of the great Doctor of the holiness of the commonplace: "These little *daily* charities, this headache, this toothache, this cold, this perverse husband or wife, this breaking of a glass, this contempt or scorn, the loss of a pair of gloves, of a ring or a handkerchief, those little inconveniences of going to bed early, and rising early to pray, or to communicate, that little bashfulness we feel in performing certain acts of devotion in public, in short all these trivial sufferings being accepted and

embraced with love, are highly pleasing to the Divine Goodness, Who, for a cup of cold water only, has promised an *eternal* reward to His faithful servants (Matt. x. 42). Wherefore as these occasions present themselves *every moment*, we can by their means heap up a great store of riches" (*Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part III., ch. xxxv.).

Of all the painful abstinences of the saints, none is so conspicuous as their frugal use of time. A wise man, in the most practical meaning of the term, is one who has learned the worth of eternity by studying the value of time. So we may define practical wisdom as the power of fixing attention to affairs of the present moment with a view to future profit. The glorious ages of the hereafter are microscoped in the moments of the brightly shining *now*. "For," says St. Paul, "that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. iv. 17). Ages there will be measured by moments here.

No one values time so justly as the man whose hours are the rungs of a ladder between earth and heaven, nay, of the ladder between the heart of our Savior on the Altar, and the heart of His Father. "Amen, amen," said Jesus to His first chosen disciples, "I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John i. 51). Veritable and literal angels, no doubt, and they come not empty handed from the Father, Who gives us "every best gift and every perfect gift" (James i. 17). That ladder is the calendar of time. Upwards upon it each moment is borne a tally of some good thought, some kindly deed. Our acts of love are borne swiftly to Paradise by our guardian angels, made welcome there, because consecrated by our Redeemer's inspiration. The official prayer of Holy Church, the divine office, is denominated *The Hours*, and St. Benedict calls it a divine labor, *Opus Dei*. Our routine of prayer is the itinerary of our pilgrimage between earth and heaven. O how well spent are the holy hours of such divine occupation as



meditation, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, spiritual reading, holy conversation, sacred silence!

A close watch on the coming and going of our hours, is the holiest form of vigilance, for "the night cometh when no man can work" (John ix. 4), and it behooves us to snatch as best we may the ever-passing opportunities for doing good things, and saying good words. "My Father worketh until now; and I work" (John v. 17), is the heavenly pattern of strong outreaching exertion; and the great Apostle adds this admonition: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. ii. 12). There comes an hour when all opportunity is over and gone; the blessed present is the work day of Jesus, His Father and ourselves for our soul's salvation; that salvation trembles every moment in the balance of eternal fate. These three immensely important truths are each of them separately, and all of them jointly, predicates of time.

The current time and its ordinary use: behold the terms of life's problem. Time's stream is too deep for our feeble gaze, and its waves are swept beyond us by a force all supreme. When our Lord's disciples asked Him about the great events of their future, He bade them fall back on faith: "He said to them: It is not for you to know the time and the moments which the Father hath put in His own power" (Acts i. 7). But it is ours to know that all times and moments are in the power of Him, Whose whole power is exerted to give us a happy eternity for our faithful use of time. Therefore the very arcanum of Christian wisdom is this: how to pass the time. Advertence to the lapse of time is of the essence of spiritual recollectedness. He seldom stumbles and never falls who is lifted onward by the flow of time, but, says Solomon, "He that is hasty with his feet shall stumble" (Prov. xix. 2).

St. Alphonsus vowed to God never to waste any time. Few of even our greatest souls may safely go so far, for this precious commodity is thrust upon us with divine prodigality, and the least relaxation of attention is a costly neglect. But we can fix our

principles uprightly in our mind. Not "come easy, go easy," but "hold fast all I give you" should be our attitude. It is a great stride forward in any virtue when its fundamental rule is revered interiorly; some degree of diligent practice will surely follow. Let us realize, then, that in the divine plan of our everyday dwelling there is no lumber room. Father Hecker regretted the hours of sleep that nature demanded of him. For most of us, one-third of the twenty-four hours must be passed in the total oblivion of sleep. Two, and in some cases three hours, are granted by the rules of many religious communities for common recreation. Bodily health in a multitude of cases vigorously claims two hours more for merely physical exercise. Religion and the daily tasks of our vocation may have the rest, but even this is often yielded grudgingly.

Recollectedness of spirit cultivates a grudging feeling towards the things of relaxation, not of prayer and labor, and rests and plays so lightly that the mind can be half in doors and half out of doors even in the heartiest recreation. A recollected mind never quite ceases to think of God and of doing good, distilling into its very amusements drops of holy aspiration.

Time is given us for our spiritual raiment, as cloth for a garment, and we have to cut it and fit it and sew it on our soul. But our scissors seldom keep on the line between the selvage and the cloth. We cut into the cloth of our day in a wasteful way, and sometimes there is as much precious material of time wasted in scraps as is consumed in the garment itself. A thrifty housekeeper studies shape and size so carefully that the waste of cloth is little, and that little is carefully collected and made into a patch quilt; and even the listing is woven into a rag carpet. Who cuts and fits his time as carefully as that? Our Lord was lavish of His gift of bread and fish to His thousands of followers, and He could spread that miraculous banquet to thousands of others with no effort but a thought: bread and fish were cheap to Him, and charity exhaustless, yet He would have no waste. When all were filled He said to His disciples: "Gather up the fragments that

remain, lest they be lost" (John vi. 12). The saints use their recreation time to better purpose than we do our hours of work. Their recreation is only another form of advertence to divine things; their chit chat is a paradise to their brethren. What of our recreation, and our chit chat? Nay, what one among us preaches or studies or even prays with recollection?

Another peculiarity of the saints is that they treat ordinary times as we treat special times. The holy hope of heaven rests upon doing the usual things at the usual hours, with a conscience habitually exacting. Progress in the ways of God is not by sudden bursts of fervor, good as these are, but in the steadfast purpose to push on, and the arrangement of hours and duties with reference one to the other. "The race is not to the swift" (Eccles. ix. 11). Zeal is not hurry, caution is not procrastination. In the fable, the hare was the swifter, the turtle was the steadier: which of them won the race? One prayer at the right time is better than two prayers at another time. The mighty prayer is the daily prayer. Every morning: "O God, my God, to Thee do I watch at break of day" (Ps. lxii. 2), forming my intention and forecasting my dangers. Every evening: "I will water my couch with my tears" (Ps. vi. 7) in my faithful examination of the day's faults. In the same spirit our Lord bids us pray: "Give us *this day* our *daily* bread" (Luke xi. 3). Overfeeding at meal times, and any feeding between meals, equally overload the stomach. Good done out of time is only half done. It is doubly well done when graced with punctuality.

Fidelity to time is fidelity to God, Who is the Ancient of days (Dan. vii. 9). To be a spiritual laggard is to be in danger of the sin of sloth, which is a capital sin. Not to do timely good, is always to come near doing wrong, and sometimes to be guilty of positive evil. Many Christians do not appreciate that indolence and procrastination are sins and sources of sins. Slovenly forgetfulness of engagements and appointments is but too common a fault—a spiritual malady easy to diagnose and hard to cure. It happens now and then that a time waster must be

let drop by the Lord into some startling act of wickedness before the deeper, but less shocking, guilt of sloth can be unveiled and remedied. On the other hand, a soul faithful to the routine of a rule of life, will, in due time, be enriched by exceptional graces.

Sinful habits are not a deposit of evil, and a mass of criminal foulness which we have only to cover over and bury under another deposit and mass of good; they are rather a ganglion of perverted tendencies, a latent craving for joy in sensuality, in false liberty, in bitter hatreds. Our principal grace, therefore, is granted, not altogether for doing good things, but also for repressing evil waywardness. Or, if you will, our well-doing, consists chiefly in practising the virtues, most opposed to our besetting weaknesses, with a distinct purpose of their suppression. The discipline of this aggressive resistance to evil must range and marshal our nobler forces every day, hour, and minute, our salvation depending upon our being active, persistent, vigilant. Nor does the plan of campaign differ when years of fidelity and love have established a well-cut groove of religious observance. For then we have our penance to do, and we pray and labor for what Holy Church calls "room for true penance" *spatium veræ penitentiaë*, lest we be at last condemned to a very long purgatory.

The days that are ours by excellence of ownership, are those which divine predestination has fixed as the hinges of our destiny, placing our names over against them in the long calendar of time—as much ours for eternal weal or woe as was that fateful Sunday, the day of the city of Jerusalem: "This thy day." When, on that day, Jesus "drew near, seeing the city He wept over it, saying: If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace. But now they are hidden from thy eyes. . . . And they shall not leave in thee a stone, upon a stone, because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation" (Luke xix. 41-44). Its dawn was bright with the splendor of the sun of Palestine, but its messages and their divine Herald



were not recognized, because the eyes of Jerusalem were blurred with passion and with pride. Likewise my day shall dawn. What shall I do but watch for that day, watch for the inspiration of grace, the behests of God's representatives, the tokens of His providence, watch and pray? I may not claim miracles, but I am entitled to many divine days all my own. I cannot create one little particle of a minute, but I know, as I know God, that I am granted ownership of the day of my death, at what date, I know not, nor at what era of my plans and schemes, only that it is fixed by God, Who warns me of it: "Watch ye therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour" (Matt. xxv. 13). I appreciate, besides, that I have already had other days quite my own—my birthday, the day of my baptism, that of my vocation, that of my final conversion to a devout life, of my acquisition of the pivotal virtue of my career. Yet again there are holy anniversaries, which I may know, or not know now, but which I shall surely know and keep sacred in heaven itself—festivals and retreats, and first holy acquaintanceships, days of calamity and of favors. New days are also before me, towards which I look as did Simeon of old: "And behold there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was in him. And he received an answer from the Holy Ghost that he should not see death until he had seen the Christ of the Lord. And he came by the Spirit into the temple" (Luke ii. 25-27). How plaintive this straining look into the future, not of Simeon alone, but of all the other just men and women of Israel. How magnificent its reward.

The spiritual use of time is also an interior reckoning of its intervals. It is a living realization of the Preacher's saying: "All things have their season, and in their times all things pass under heaven. A time to be born, a time to die. . . . A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance" (Eccles. iii. 1-4). Wisdom has become a practical guide when it tells what day to quit this and begin that for the love



of God. All kinds of work it guides, nor does it cease in play. The saints were ruled by it in their very dreams, ordinary Christians make it the holiness even of meal times: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x. 31). He should be a prudent and thoughtful soul who is God's steward entrusted with time for the benefit of His other children: "Who is the faithful and wise steward whom the Lord hath set over His family, to give them their measure of wheat in due season?" (Luke xii. 42.) Such a one should be often deeply, always sufficiently, recollected. A light character appropriates his time and that of others for human ends; the divine aims of life only get what cannot be denied without acute remorse. A man falls finally and forever because at the inception of a mighty temptation he was caught in a wasteful mood.

A man is rich because he has earned a vast sum; or because he has inherited it. If he invest his riches wisely the mere lapse of time makes him richer. Such is the case spiritually with one whose hours and days flow into the heart of God. Mere watching and waiting, to a soul attentive to God, is an unearned increment of heavenly value. To some plants the very atmosphere contributes their best food constituents. God is our atmosphere: "For in Him we live, and move, and are" (Acts xvii. 28)—that is to say, in God we pass our time.

Idle reading; idle talking and listening; lack of order in daily work; confusion of occupations; habits of procrastination; too much recreation; too much sleep; irregular hours—let holy obedience, special and relentless obedience to a stated rule of life, deliver us from these enemies of our salvation or of our perfection. May we be possessed by a holy ambition to prolong work and prayer and to shorten play. The Curé of Ars for many years spent eighteen hours out of every twenty-four in hearing confessions. One day passing from the church to his house he sank down by the wayside, utterly worn out; and he exclaimed: "I know one Christian who is glad that heaven is a place of rest."

O how bitter is purgatory to a slothful Christian—if he be so fortunate as to get there!

Now and now only can I do good. Spiritual procrastination is the thief of time, our dearest treasure in life. Each day, every hour, is privileged to procure the extension of the eternal years. And before us lies a day and hour which shall lap upon the endless cycles of paradise. Once a hunter in a forest of Spain heard a voice singing with accents of perfect happiness. Following the sound he came upon a lonely hut, and at its door was the joyful singer—a leper picking off pieces of his decaying flesh. “Why dost thou sing so gaily,” asked the hunter, “covered as thou art with miserable sores and driven away from the company of thy fellowmen?” The answer was this: “Sir, I sing for joy, that between me and God there is only this little wall of mud, my body. That hindrance removed I shall be united to Him in perfect bliss. Seeing, therefore, how day by day my body melts away, I am happy.”

Fleeting time: a soul which ardently aspires to eternity only takes notice of its perishing moments to reckon the approach of final union with God in immortal life. To such St. Teresa’s *Canticle of Death* expresses the occasional acuteness of the pain of banishment:

Ah! what a length does life appear!  
How hard to bear this exile here!  
How hard from weary day to day  
To pine without relief!  
The yearning hope to break away  
From this my prison house of clay,  
Inspires so sharp a grief  
That evermore I weep and sigh,  
Dying because I do not die.

This only gives me life and strength;  
To know that die I must at length,  
For hope insures me bliss divine  
Through death, and death alone.  
O Death! for thee, for thee, I pine!

Sweet Death! Of life the origin!  
Ah, wing thee hither soon;  
For evermore I weep and sigh,  
Dying because I do not die.\*

The anguish and pains of the death hour do not appal one who loves God in such very truth, that to enter His presence "in the light of the living" (Ps. lv. 13) has become the main desire of existence.

\*Caswall's translation.

### XXXIII.

#### BROTHERLY LOVE.

WHEN two men are mutually humbled by the sight of each other's virtues, they have reached a good degree of fraternal affection. Still each has a nearer duty of brotherly affection. For at his elbow stands a saint or a sinner of his own household; day and night he is in and out with relatives, or with brethren in religion, each one of whom is a living scourge of penance or a living stimulant of edification. All this is of God's ordering. The great Founder of orders is God, and His most ancient and most numerous order is the family. He is the Inspiration of every community rule, and the presiding influence in all good common work. To bear ourselves well and kindly and equably amid our fellows for the love of God, our great aboriginal Holy Founder, means the extinction of vice and the fruitfulness of grace within us. St. John Berchmans said: "My greatest penance is community life; it is the tomb of self-love." Persevere a gentle member of your family for the sake of Christ's love, and other grace of perseverance you need not seek: an outward life but an inward divine force. It is thus described by the prince of the Apostles: "The hidden man of the heart in the incorruptibility of a quiet and a meek spirit, which is rich in the sight of God" (1 Peter iii. 4).

Peace of heart; gentle quiet of mind; universal well wishing: all expended upon our nearest associates—does it not seem easy? Is it not happy? Is it not its own reward? It is the most precious treasure of life's voyage. My ship could unload much religious sentimentality and be all the more seaworthy, it could also throw overboard much talent of mind and sail prosperously and make good profit. But who would jettison one atom of gentleness of nature, one littlest tendency to ignore a cutting re-

mark? O for a talented consoler of the afflicted! O for a man with a genius for forgetting little slights! On the other hand, what a devil's servant is a man or a woman in a family or a convent whose heart is hard, whose ugly temper is unbridled? The legion of devils said to our Lord: "If thou cast us out hence, send us into the herd of swine. And He said to them: Go. But they going out went into the swine" (Matt. viii. 31, 32). Dissensions, suspicions, mistrust, resistance to authority, whisperings, gossipings, acrid disputes, personal aversions, unkind feelings, particular friendships, cliques, confidential exchanges of fault-finding, how unworthy of a band of Christ's followers are such things as these. They are fatal to peace and mutual affection. These traits belong only to swinish natures, ignorant and brutish men and women, yet they are sometimes found amongst dwellers in God's holiest shrines. It is in Christian families that our Savior's sad prophecy often comes true: "A man's enemies shall be they of his own household" (Matt. x. 36). The fate of such a household would be sealed, but that whereas a few are enemies of all the others, good and bad, so a few of a different kind are friends of all both good and bad—devoted friends, faithful and long suffering. Such a one says: When God loves us all who am I that I should pick and choose, loving some and not loving others? When to all of these my brothers and my sisters the Lord may say at the last day: "Come ye blessed of My Father" (Matt. xxv. 34), shall I say to them in this mortal life: Depart from me?

We meet with good people who rarely see anything to praise except when looking at themselves; or maybe they (and these are pious creatures) are afraid to praise people, lest they puff them up with vanity. How different was the Apostle of the Gentiles. His epistles are full of praise, and such terms as "my dearest" and "my best loved," "my joy and my crown," are met with everywhere. He is extravagant in his praise; so some of us would think. Neither should we fail to give praise for fear of causing vanity. I had rather surfeit a poor man than starve him.



The vainglory left after praise is like the shiny soap on one's face after washing—better than dirt, anyway.

How deep is the wound of original sin, that living together in common, even of one blood and name, we seem inevitably led into misunderstandings. The virtue which is able to meet and overcome this evil or brotherly dissension in that form of fraternal love called patience with one's own; a meek and cheerful bearing of one another's burdens. What hurts me in my brother's words is also burdensome to him, for it is generally due to a natural failing—a bad temper, sadness, childishness. Or perhaps worse, to a more injurious tendency, such as native uncouthness and grossness of character, forgetfulness of favors, sharpness of tongue. A meek acceptance of hurtful words and deeds from those we love is often the high watermark of the stream of divine grace. No lessening of affection for them because it happens that they cannot or will not appreciate our kindness—this is both the substance and symbol of the divine virtue of fraternal charity. Are you suspected of selfish motives of ambition? Can you instantly pardon such injustice? Are you voted and rated a clown and a dullard because you will not belie your convictions? Can you instantly ignore this? These questions and answers are an excerpt from the little catechism of holy love.

The weapons of love are stronger than those of fear. Have you failed by scolding? by chastisements? Try love. If I think you want to scare me, I am instantly on my mettle, and I resist. But if I so much as suspect that you want to grasp my soul's right hand to lead me away from danger, I am scared, indeed, but not by you or your admonitions, rather by myself and my folly and sinfulness.

What principle of life is so noble as the love that springs from the divine fatherhood? The mighty truth that there is but "one God and Father of all" (Eph. iv. 6), makes of all nations under heaven that one family which acclaims Jesus Christ the "first-born among many brethren" (Rom. viii. 29). It makes

of all mankind a holy community, having common ownership of all spiritual goods. It sees in every soul of man the living image of the beloved Father in heaven. It sees that soul adorned with the rich jewels of the blood-purchased redemption of the Crucified.

Here then is the law of brotherly love; as like unto the law of divine love as one twin child is like its brother: "The second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. xxii. 39). A law universal, a law of emergency, a law of the heart, a law that is a dogma; such is the law of brotherly love.

Once a friend in a pious mood confided to us his entire willingness to stay in purgatory till the day of judgment: so much was he humbled by the thought of his past sins. But the very same day he bitterly complained of his lot in being forced to live and work with an uncongenial associate. "I feel glad," he said, "that I am likely to be rid of him in a couple of months." So this pious man was glad of a thousand years in purgatory, but sorry for a short unpleasant companionship in this life. He did not, apparently, notice the glaring inconsistency of this frame of mind. The truest purgatory a sinner can crave in his moments of compunction, is the bearing of another sinner's company. And the best solace of the pains of the purgatory of the present life is love of one's purgatorial associate. A cranky man's company is the cleansing fire of divine love, if we did but rightly understand things. To live peaceably with a quarrelsome friend is very often to bar him out of—not purgatory but perdition. Souls who thus act are the buffers between earth and hell. They are, besides, excellent convert-makers.

The trouble often is that one does good things in a faulty way. A man is *over* zealous. He is unmindful of superiors. He is impatient with slower natures, and upbraids them. He works alone, without seeking or caring for brotherly counsel, and he frowns on coöperation. He had rather have hireling servants with him than equal brethren. And hence the good he does is turned into evil. If persons outside profit, his intimates inside

suffer. But the reverse of these defects will not save you from trouble. If you work faultlessly, your motives will be impugned. If you are universally submissive, if you are anxious for advice, if you invite or even implore coöperation, it will be said of you: He is shirking responsibility. Dissensions among relatives and religious brethren—and we are speaking of devout persons—spring up like weeds among the good grain, and the only deep searching remedy is an over-mastering tendency to be glad of suffering from the defects of one's providential associates for the love of Jesus Crucified.

That the love of our neighbor is a law, all Christians acknowledge, little as some of them realize its pressing insistence in daily life. Not all, however, appreciate that it is a law with a penalty. And such a penalty!—*lex talionis* or return of injury, back from the injured upon the injurer. "For," says our great Lawgiver, "with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. vii. 2). There is refinement of justice in forcing a delinquent to measure out his own punishment upon himself by the same measure he used in injuring his neighbor. We believe that purgatory will reveal some stern examples of this. Many would rush into the chair of judgment and gladly fulminate sentence against sinners; we are doing this in our talk all the time. Few there are who boldly stand forth as the advocate of an absent stranger or even friend, who is being tongue-lashed in conversation. Many a one in his more honest musings owns that there is nothing plainer than that he has less than the ordinary share of affectionateness. What a misfortune to be lacking in the most essential of all virtues. To make up for the lack of kindness what a strong grace is needed. Are you thinking of a novena to gain a miracle? Postpone that, and offer a few communions for an increase of brotherly love at the expense even of your acute sensitiveness to justice and right. A strong sense of justice with but a weak sense of sympathy, is like a man with a strong left arm and a paralyzed right arm.

Once in the olden time there was a community, and inspiration says of its members, that "they had but one heart and one soul" (Acts iv. 32). No wonder that they possessed all earthly goods in common, since their spiritual goods, their thoughts and affections, were common property. Once a religious was asked: "How much money did you bring to this community?" She answered smiling: "I didn't bring thirty cents." But she was a kindly nature, busy without confusion, and never thoughtless of the comfort of others. So she had brought a priceless contribution to her order, a loving heart and a quiet mind, pouring uncounted treasures into the common stock of "justice and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xiv. 17). One may dispense with a dowry of money, but the dowry of love can never be dispensed with. The grand totality of fraternal joy constantly bestows itself upon one's associates, principal and interest, "from a pure heart, and a good conscience" (1 Tim. i. 5). While of him whose heart bubbles over with unfailing bitterness, whose complaints and criticisms are incessant, the word of the Holy Ghost is true: "The opening of his mouth is the kindling of a fire" (Ecclus. xx. 15).

You may not be able to print ten words that will be read ten days afterward. But you can stamp into the souls of others indelible records of evil. You can easily say many words, whole pages of bitterness, not a single sentence of which shall ever be forgotten, and hardly be forgiven. Yet it is a blessed thing that a hasty word of hot anger can be overtaken and made to perish by a yet swifter word of regret. "If," says the Wise Man, "thou blow the spark, it shall burn as a fire; if thou spit upon it, it shall be quenched. Both [the breath that fans the flame and the spittle that quenches it] come out of the mouth" (Ecclus. xxviii. 14).

The music of a mother's voice rivals the sweetness of the voice of an angel. But we know not if in hell itself there be anything harsher than the voice of an angry woman or man. Yet how often is such a voice joined to a clear head and a strong



will. Men do God's work, or try to do it, with the demon's tools, striving to work charity with hate's methods, inculcating piety with a bully's brutality, or a meddler's intrusion. In war-like guise some spirits seek to advance the sway of the Prince of Peace. Peaceful ways and means for peaceful ends should be our motto. "Therefore," says St. Paul, "let us follow after the things that are of peace, and keep the things that are of edification, one towards another" (Rom. xiv. 19). Before making a move towards good order, one should pause to consider if there be not a choice of means, finally selecting the peaceful way of patience and of persuasion. "The Lord hath given me a learned tongue, that I should know how to uphold by word him that is weary" (Is. l. 4). O blessed learning! O blessed family or convent, which is a normal college for imparting the science and art of upholding the weary, and correcting the wayward with a loving tongue. The kerchief of Veronica wiped the face of our weary Redeemer on the road to Calvary. God has given each of us in our consoling words a kerchief to wipe away the tears of wayworn souls in distress.

To teach little children well, we must study, we must practise long. But who ever thinks of studying how to soothe wounded sensibilities? or how to invite the confidence of friends suffering from disappointment? I had rather be a little fountain of consolation than a deep river of showy learning. "You can catch more flies with a drop of honey, than with a barrel of vinegar," is St. Francis de Sales' far-famed saying.

The positive and negative practice of this high lowliness is embodied in some maxims of St. Teresa: "Never, under any circumstances, show contempt for anyone. Never blame anyone without showing much discretion, humility and self-contempt. Never excuse yourself except for a very just cause. Never exaggerate anything, on the contrary, give your opinion with moderation. Never assert anything without being very certain of it. When anyone speaks to you on spiritual subjects, hear him with humility (no matter how simple or ignorant he may be), and as a



disciple, and take to yourself all the good you can glean from his words" (*Maxims* 7-17).

Another duty is that of prayer for others; nor should we fail to let our beneficiaries know of this token of our love. So St. Paul says: "Always in all my prayers making supplication for you all, with joy" (Phil. i. 4). Incessant prayer for them, because uninterrupted thought about them: "For God is my witness how I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 8). Whenever it happens that even our distractions in prayer are painful thoughts about friends in sin or error, then we have reached a good state both of zeal and of prayer.

Some of us seem to think that virtue indoors our heart has nothing immediately to do with virtue out of doors to our neighbor. This is externalism with a vengeance. Quiet meditation in a little corner with a little book, the book of the Gospels; considering interiorly our Savior's ways and means of making others happy here and hereafter—this it is that makes one an active Christian of the right sort—the only sort that never gives up, and finally succeeds thoroughly well. We may well admire St. Paul's devoted affection for St. Timothy, "Without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day. Desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears" (2 Tim. i. 3, 4), he says. Absorbed in Christ as this intense Apostle was, yet not an hour of the day or night but witnessed his prayer for one whom he called his "dearly beloved son." We know too with what equal devotedness he bore in mind those who were most unlike Timothy, the wayward members of his following; indeed the entire human race was ever taxing his vast power of fraternal love. He was a declared enemy of the bickerings which so commonly hinder God's good purposes among His servants. "For, whereas there is among you envying and contention, are you not carnal, and walk according to the flesh?" (1 Cor. iii. 3.) This he wrote to his converts. Emulation in doing good degenerates into rivalry, zeal becomes ambition, affection for one

is spoiled by aversion for another. And although these communities, are not considered carnal vices, yet the Apostle ranks them without hesitation alongside the fleshy concupiscence. The fabled philosopher's stone turned everything it touched into gold. Greater wealth is in the touch of that holy tongue which turns a friend's chagrin into a cheery laugh. Our Redeemer among His farewell words used these: "I have been among you as one who served" (Luke xxii. 27). We could wish no better epitaph: He was among his brethren as one who served. In this striving world there is but one ambition that is not sinful, it is the ambition to excel in the lowly achievements of sacred peace.

A pious, envious Christian is the most offensive of monopolists, being one who gets much and gives little happiness. How different from St. Paul: "I also in all things please all men, not seeking that which is profitable to myself, but to many" (1 Cor. x. 33). O unselfishness, how beautiful a virtue art thou! privileged to make happy and restful the lives of our brothers and sisters, wearied in the service of God.

This beautiful virtue may be ours if we will but ignore others' unpleasant traits, and drill our hearts to seek happiness in making others happy. Is not that easier than self-assertion. I feed often on the sacrament of love; shall it be easy for me afterwards to devour my friend's peace of soul?

Overtenderness of heart—we call it weakness, but it is no weakness at all, for how else did the Son of God treat His terrible enemies?—no weakness at all, except occasionally in a superior. But a critical disposition, censorious, exacting, suspicious, standing on one's rights, is a grave blemish. A religious not readily inclined to extreme forbearance with others, has his novitiate to make over again. Our faults against peace are not seldom done under pretense of zeal. But good works are not advanced at expense of good feeling, nor is such the notion of saints, for, says the Apostle: "If any man seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor the Church of God" (1 Cor.

xi. 16). Zeal without discretion makes blunders. Zeal without love commits sins.

A disobliging word ranks in the memory like a barbed hook, sometimes more painful to draw out than to insert. Blind personal aversion often leads to serious dissensions. Native uncouthness is punished by black looks. Good deeds of associates are belittled by attributing to them unworthy motives. Attributing motives is human vivisection.

Among the Monks of the Desert the Abbot John used to say: "The perfection of a hermit is his ability to endure the frightful solitude of the wilderness. The perfection of a monk is his ability to support the infirmities of his brethren." As a matter of fact the stab of a sharp elbow is often harder to bear than the loneliness of a sleepless night. Can you for the love of Christ accommodate yourself to the peculiarities of your family or your community? Then you are nigh to the kingdom of God. Are you ambitious of the rôle of peacemaker? Then yours is the title of a child of God.

#### XXXIV.

### THE APOSTOLATE OF THE SCHOOLROOM.

AT the outbreak of the persecution of the Emperor Nero the Apostle St. Peter, following the advice of his associates, fled from the city of Rome. As he was leaving it behind him in the darkness of the night, he saw, coming toward him, the figure of his divine Master. The Apostle was amazed and distressed, and he cried out: "Lord, whither goest Thou?" "I am going to Rome to be crucified," was our Savior's answer, and He passed by Peter and disappeared in the direction of the city's gate. The Apostle returned forthwith to the city to suffer martyrdom. So, when a Christian school teacher says in his soul: I dread returning morning and afternoon to that torment, to that mob of restless, stupid, ungrateful children, let him see before him Jesus ready to be crucified for them anew. Forthwith he will gladly return to his martyrdom that those little souls may possess Christ's saving truth, to teach them to live well and to die well.

The relation between the teacher and taught is expressed by the Apostle in his letter to Philemon (i. 19): "Thou owest me thy ownself also." The Apostle had converted Philemon, and claimed his soul as a trophy of victory. Child—the teacher can confidently say—thou owest me thy immortal soul. And to God he can say: For this privilege, O Lord, I do not begrudge the weary hours of class. The man is indeed rich who has a valid title to immortal souls. If we duly appreciated what St. Paul meant when he said to us: "You are bought with a great price," we could not grudge any labor or any anguish in our vocation. For the price of souls is the lifeblood of the Son of God.

Remember our Savior's final appointment of St. Peter to  
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be His chief shepherd: "Simon, lovest thou Me? . . . . Feed My lambs" (John xxi. 16). So everyone of the teacher's many acts of love paid to Jesus in his private devotions is tested by the same great Teacher of Christendom: "Teacher, lovest thou Me? Go to the classroom and feed My lambs." "With what do we feed these dear little lambs?" asks St. Francis de Sales. "With love itself. For either they do not live, or they live by love and to love." Either to love God or to forfeit eternal life, this is their only choice. "He that loveth not, abideth in death" (1 John iii. 14). Love must sweeten every morsel of the bitter monotony of the classroom. And if anyone complains: My nature is cold; love is not in me, we answer him: that very confession to the all-loving Jesus is a sign of latent love. O Lord (it seems to say) wilt Thou permit me to be forever cold and loveless in a room full of little hearts panting for love? Your daily spiritual exercises may and should give love's quiet ardor to your work among the children. Strongly emotional natures are not always the most steadfastly affectionate. The winter apple is the best; it is ripened by the chill sunshine of autumn, and mellowed by the frost of November. A cold nature patiently longing and praying and striving for a kindly manner, will in the long run become an ideal Christian teacher.

"That I may open my mouth?" says St. Paul, "with confidence, to make known the mystery of the Gospel. For which I am an ambassador in a chain" (Eph. vi. 19, 20). Who ever heard of an ambassador in a chain, until Jesus became a Monarch on a cross, and until St. Paul and all the other Apostles proclaimed liberty to all men with shackled limbs, and from darksome prisons. So it is with the message of Christ delivered to His little ones by His ambassador in the Christian school. If he be fast bound in the fetters of holy self-restraint, then is his message that of the "liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. viii. 21). We know not if any priest, parent or teacher can represent Christ except he be an ambassador in a chain of holy living, true obedience, humble self-effacement. The biographer



of St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland, says that "her good works were more wonderful than her miracles." Christ taught by work as well as by word. His self-immolation was the consecration as well as the practical success of His office of teacher. And of many a school teacher it may be affirmed, that the steadfast self-conquest of his daily life is the only explanation of his success with his pupils.

What a privilege it is to have these immortal beings entirely under your influence during the formative years of their lives! The child's work day is passed wholly under your guidance. What he gets from you is all, or nearly all, that he ever gets to keep unto the end. Few of us learn anything after quitting school. At any rate whatever is learned afterwards is but, in some way or other, a development of the school tasks, just as the big tomes of theology are only the amplification of the little catechism. To that compendium of all wisdom our Lord's words may be applied, that the kingdom of heaven is like to the little mustard seed, the least of all seeds, that yet groweth into a tree in which the birds of the air may dwell (Luke xiii. 19). It is the little grain from which the whole tree of life is grown. The seed that springeth up and groweth whilst he knoweth not (Mark iv. 27). Every lesson you teach has the fruitfulness of the Holy Ghost in it. One has but to plant it in the child's heart, and in due time shall appear the fruit of the Spirit in his life. Christian teacher when thou sayest of one of thy pupils: "That child is a thorn in my side," remember that from the thorn may blossom a rose dyed by the red blood of thy patience.

The souls of children are wonderfully receptive, especially when they are penetrated with the grace of God. They are clay in the hands of the potter. No plainer proof of the divinity of the teacher's vocation could be thought of than that, by God's universal law all mankind must be children first, and men and women afterwards. All human beings are made to be taught. Of teachers, bad or good, the whole race are the victims or beneficiaries. When your school children pass from you into their

struggle for existence, all their life long the remembrance of your words, your looks, your bearing, your discipline, will go with them; every single day till their very last you will continue to teach them.

Take a diamond ring and write with it upon a window pane. The words can never be effaced till the glass is destroyed. The human soul can never be destroyed, and upon it the teacher writes God's truth and love with the prophet's "pen of iron, with the point of a diamond" (Jer. xvii. 1). As a beast is branded with his owner's name, so the soul is marked with the ownership of God, and this is done in the school no less indelibly than in the home or in the church. Eulalia was a young maiden who suffered martyrdom in Spain in the persecution of Diocletian. When they began to tear her flesh with iron claws, she exclaimed, "Lord, they are writing on me that Thou art mine!" As our Savior bore our sins cut deep into His sacred flesh by His cruel wounds, so would He have each of us bear in our souls, and even in our bodies, His name and His claim, and His doctrine and His love ineffaceably written.

School tasks are painful to children and, therefore, painful to their teachers. The entire religion of Christ is a loving allotment of suffering in union with the crucified Son of God, and teachers are endowed by God with the requisite graces of mind and heart to make the divine process efficacious. The Apostle's exhortation to Timothy applies to them: "Be thou an example of the faithful, in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith" (1 Tim. iv. 12). By the word example, St. Paul describes the entire personal influence of an instructor.

Our Redeemer has made patience an apostolic virtue, saying to His disciples: "In your patience you shall possess your souls" (Luke xxi. 19). Is not this proved in the schoolroom? For it sometimes seems as if the teacher's very spirit were being wrenched out of his control, amid the riot of unruly children. But victory means the welfare of the children and the perfect self-control of the teacher. Never forget that patient suffering

was chosen by the Son of God, out of all the possible means of our salvation, as being of supreme excellence. To endure injuries, to bear calmly the bitterness of disappointment, to be resigned absolutely under the contradictions and ingratitude of parents—to be and to do all this with ease and cheerfulness, is that part of the science of pedagogy which is wholly divine.

The joys of teaching flow chiefly from the delightful observation of results. The teacher and the parent, above all men, eat the fruit of their own vineyard. The play of truth upon reason in the early dawn of intelligence, can only be surpassed in beauty by the spectacle of the heart's earliest impulses rising upwards towards heaven. Another and almost rival joy is the teacher's consciousness of a hard task well done. At the very worst he makes a conquest of by far the majority of the children under his charge, winning them permanently to the practice of Christian virtue. In his trials, therefore, he can appropriate the prophet's words to the Almighty: "According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, Thy comforts have given joy to my soul" (Ps. xciii. 19).

St. Augustine says: "The man and the sinner are as it were two different things. What thou callest the man in thee, God made; but what thou callest the sinner, thou hast thyself made. Destroy what thou hast made, that God may save what He has made." Surely this is the true state of our existence, and it is our task to distinguish within us the man that God made from the man that man made. The teacher superintends in his pupils the beginnings in the life-long struggle between these rival aspirants for the soul's mastery. What gift could the Holy Spirit give him greater than love for the training of souls to their salvation? To see God's image in the child's immortal soul, to preserve it undefaced and unprofaned by error and vice, is to see with God's eyes. To do one's duty by the child, is to bestow eternal life upon the man. Who shall be glad and rejoice in his vocation if not the Christian teacher; but this involves suffering. And how could it be otherwise? It was when our Redeemer was lifted

upon the cross, that He drew men's hearts to Himself (John xii. 32). It cannot be otherwise with those He associates with Him in His work of salvation. The apostolate of Jesus Crucified must be one of suffering in its every branch. Shall the apostolate of the schoolroom be exempt?

The teacher is to the children the best exhibit of what Christ's Gospel can do—the finished product of the influence of the Holy Ghost acting through Church and sacraments. He shows in living splendor the miraculous balance between the sterner and sweeter virtues of God's religion; the difference between firmness and harshness; how to be mild without admixture of weakness; to distinguish between temperaments without shadow of partiality. He must love without sentimentality. He must hate vice yet love the vicious. Père Lallemand says that the best teacher is the one that best wins the children's heart. This is not done by relaxing vigilance or throwing down barriers of discipline, but by the ineffable charm of gentleness of manner, tones of voice, looks, and gestures. Children do not resent discipline, even strict discipline; but they must know that the teacher is impartial, affectionate, incapable of outburst of anger. They do resent injustice. They have a detective's faculty for discovering a teacher's delinquencies—and an angel's faculty for reverencing his virtue, at least in the more interior parts of their soul, even though childish irritation overspread the surface.

It is said that young ladies practise smiling before the looking-glass. A teacher's looking-glass is the hearts of his pupils, sometimes even their faces. And a powerful reflector it is, highly polished by the child's desire to be loved and to be favored. Can you win pleased looks from the faces of discontented children? Can you exact quick obedience by soft tones of voice? Answer these and a few more such questions affirmatively, and you are not far from the kingdom of God.

Our Savior is severe against our outbreaks of ill temper. "Whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca!



shall be in danger of the council. And whosoever shall say, Thou fool! shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt. v. 22). His brother: what if he said these things to his child? What if he said them to many children, whom God has made his pupils for the better and longer hours of all the days of life's beginning? Never, on the other hand, is affection more praiseworthy than when it is lavished upon the very ones by whom you have been teased and fretted till you are well nigh beside yourself. Remember, even if you are dealing with young murderers and apostates, God has confided them to you with the grace to change them into good Christians.

The whole sanctity of Christ's Gospel may be gradually distilled into the children's nature in the schoolroom by the teacher's words and manner under provocation. Children learn much by their ears and eyes used on their books and the black-board, and just as much, or more, by gazing and listening while the teacher is talking and acting, being as it were on parade before them. And in every kind of study or of distraction, they learn from the rightly guided teacher the hardest lesson of human life, namely, how to be good to others when they are bad to you. Christian teacher, thou art God's living speech. Thou art a human document of a love so divine, that Christ says of it: "God so loved the world as to give His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (John iii. 16). Thou art a message from heaven to these little ones, who are so plainly heaven's favorites (Matt. xviii. 10); a message of salvation written and signed with the blood of the Crucified. Please the child's eyes and win his reverence by thy gentle dignity, and thou shalt win his heart unto eternal bliss. Soothe his ear and calm his restless mind with thy words, sweet, calm, and strong, and thou shalt place his feet upon the sure road to Paradise. The Apostle of the nations boasted: "And my speech and my preaching was not in the persuasive words of human wisdom, but in showing of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. ii. 4). He here described a super-



natural gift; one due from the Giver of all things to every teacher who rates his work as a divine vocation rather than a human profession—"the showing of the Spirit and of power" from above.

It is example that both tells and enforces the influences of the teacher's noble heart. The Council of Trent says: "Good example is a perpetual kind of preaching." You cannot talk all the time. But there is not a minute in which you may not in some way or other edify and thereby educate your pupils. None of the branches of knowledge that you teach can so faithfully convey the lesson of Christ's Gospel as the living religion that you yourself are. The teacher's masterpiece of art should be his own self. Never forget that the exhibit of the fruits of your personal prayer and sacrifice is part of the school curriculum. This rule descends into particulars, as, for example, the bridling of the tongue when all within one's soul is raging and flaming with wrath. Of the teacher and the parent more than of anyone else is the Wise Man's word true: "He that keepeth his mouth, keepeth his soul" (Prov. xiii. 3). When the day of reckoning comes, some of you will find that your premium teaching was your uncomplaining endurance of a wild rabble of children. And after that will come the efficacy of your calm endurance in class of such things as headaches. Where shall we find a professor of pedagogy who shall make us proficient in the art of ignoring an attack of indigestion through the livelong hours of a class day, where but in the Tabernacle?

When our Savior said of St. Paul that he should be a vessel of election to carry His name before peoples and kings, He added: "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts ix. 16). So speaks the Holy Ghost of the Christian teacher at the time of his vocation. Never hope for really great success, especially in unpromising subjects, till you have worked for Christ in great suffering. Never despair of the very greatest success, while there is any suffering left to be borne. You have children to manage who are radically bad.

First, do not be so sure of that, for what seems a radically bad boy, often turns out a thoroughly good man. The proverb that "the boy is father to the man," is a fallacy as popular as it is dangerous. Teachers have in millions of cases proved its fallacy. What is really true is that the patient suffering and persevering instruction of teachers and parents, may change the worst boy into the best man. Some good pedagogy, and much Christian patience, and your class work is a success.

Never did anyone hear of a blacksmith who could work his forge without a fire, nor did anyone ever hear of a teacher who could advance the welfare of his pupils without a flame of love. Now there is no true love of any kind in this disjointed world of ours but that it suffers for the beloved, and suffers the more painfully, as if in a flame, when it is spiritual love. Hence the Apostle says: "Let us exhibit ourselves as ministers of God in much patience" (2 Cor. vi. 4). Truly pitiful is the spectacle of a Catholic teacher harboring feelings of aversion towards particular children. Can we forget that our Savior's attraction was for common ordinary people, and especially those who were despised by others? Can we forget that it was not for dainty-mannered little ones, but just for the rude children of the people, who were crowding and annoying their elders, that He solemnly uttered His preference: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for the kingdom of heaven is for such?" (Matt. xix. 14.)

Zeal is defined as the warmth of love. But sometimes this zeal is so superheated that like an overcharge of electricity, it burns out its own apparatus. There is a zeal that destroys our own kindly feelings. Superheated zeal puts discordant harshness into our voice. It causes threatening gestures, hasty corrections. All this is followed inevitably by feelings of self-reproach. Bitter disappointment, forebodings of future and yet greater trouble possess the soul, until despair of success with the children brings the final catastrophe. Let us realize that to bear with the most untoward conditions in oneself, and in the little ones for Christ's

sake, is often the forlorn hope, the last desperate assault that captures the citadel. What victory is the most glorious? Is it not the hard won victory? Read the lives of the saints and mark that when all went smooth, they began to worry lest God had withdrawn His blessings from their holy undertakings; nay, they began to feel misgivings about their own salvation, unless they felt the cross cutting into their shoulders.

Sometimes a teacher is so unthinking as to feel that a pupil has insulted him—as if the folly of a child could wound the grown-up wisdom of a Christian. But even so; concede that a bitter taunt has shot deep into the sensibilities of a teacher: what then? When the Christian Emperor Gratian condemned a certain man to death, St. Ambrose managed with much difficulty to get access to the monarch, and said: "Your majesty, I am here to plead for that man's life for the honor of God." The Emperor answered: "That man must die, he has insulted me and my office." The Saint replied: "That he has insulted thee and thy office is all the more reason that thou shouldst forgive him." How bold a plea, and yet how truly Christian. So let it be with you when you are insulted by a rebellious, vicious child.

A patient teacher, supposing good sense and steady adherence to rule, will keep good order in school with one-tenth the chastisements of an impatient teacher. The good, peaceable nature will not lack the iron hand of discipline, but will clothe it with the velvet glove of patience. He will never lack the aid of that mildest of beings, of Whom nevertheless the disciples exclaimed: "Who is this that both the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark iv. 40.)

St. Francis de Sales addressing a much-loved friend, a school mistress, adds: "The angels of little children love with a special love those who bring up children in the fear and love of God, and instill into their tender hearts true devotion, as on the contrary our Lord threatens (Matt. xviii. 10) those who scandalize them, with the vengeance of their angels" (*Letters to Persons in the World*, Mackey, p. 304).

There is a pious custom in our churches of lighting a candle before the altar and leaving it there to burn away its blessed substance in our stead; its light is typical of our ardent love, continuing our worship after we, ourselves, have gone away. So the Christian teacher lights the triple candle of faith and hope and love in immortal souls, there to burn for God's sake and never to be quenched; its light typifies his devoted labors, and noble self-sacrifice, and continues his work, not in one, but in many souls forever.

## XXXV.

### CONVERSATION.

SPEECH is silver, silence is gold. The proverb is true. But silvern speech is often the setting for golden nuggets of silent and kindly listening, and precious jewels of affectionate and instructive words. Conversation may be defined as the barter of speaking for listening in both the graver and lighter moods of human intercourse. Conversation is too commonly looked upon as exclusively a relaxation. The off-hand talk of a professor is often better teaching than his lecture, and the mutual give and take of devoted friends is one of the finer processes of love. There is a genuine mission of conversational talk. Charity is its essential oil; soothing wounded sensibilities; cheering the despondent and diverting their minds from sadness or from bodily pain; strengthening feeble resolutions; admonishing unofficially, less seriously, banteringly, unmajestically, yet effectively; imparting information of value as if with an atomizer. Notoriously a kindly talker makes others happy; and many a soul needs only to be made happy to be put on the way of his eternal salvation. There is nothing that charity can do that it may not say. Saying things is often charity's best way of doing things. The desert has its holiness of silence, the crowd its holiness of conversation. On the wall of a certain house in Rome a bronze tablet bears this inscription: "On this corner Philip Neri chatted about God." The Roman martyr-ology names him the Apostle of Rome.

The importance of words is not fully appreciated. Holy silence and holy speech are the swing of the pendulum of a devout life. How noble is the prerogative of speech, since the very fringes of its robe, the chit-chat of a giddy hour, are of



eternal value. "But I say unto you," this is our Savior's warning against silly talk, "that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. xii. 36, 37). What an ordeal! The living God as Judge, I the culprit, the evidence every word of my every conversation! Every letter I ever wrote is on file against me in God's court; but especially is every word I ever spoke going to be repeated against me there, unless I unsay it in a sorrowful confession, "My tongue is the pen of a scrivener that writeth swiftly" (Ps. xlv. 2). All our talking in this life is recorded in the other life—an eternal record; unless our tears of contrition have erased it from the tablets of divine justice.

Watch two musicians preparing for an instrumental duet, one holds his violin and the other is seated at the piano; the violinist tunes his instrument to the piano, for that is fixed and set in its pitch. So when conversing with one who is set in his opinions, tune your mind to his, as far as truth permits and charity does not forbid, and let him perform the major part of the duet. That makes harmony. An occasional word will be your part, a very melodious part. "With them that hated peace, I was peaceable" (Ps. cxix. 7). The ultimate test of virtue is in its dealing meekly with vice.

In conversation two things are to be considered. The first is simplicity, by which one makes sure of revealing his mind candidly, his words being the mirror of his thoughts. The second is charity unto edification, by which one carefully withholds from the mirror whatever may hurt brotherly love, and maintains the tone and manner of a friend in all he says. Sometimes this holy tactfulness is sorely perplexed; for to be candid without being uncharitable is not always easy. This gift is granted by heaven to our prayers, but especially it is the reward of a mortified life.

Keep a close guard upon your tongue when within hearing of irritable friends. "Unguarded effusions," Père Lallemand

calls them, make up a big part of our daily faults. A witty tongue—O how often is it a worse misfortune than a humped back. It is the hardest to resist of our daily tempters. The inclination to raise a laugh at the expense of another is perversity disguised as humor—all the harder to resist if he be known to be easily offended. The derisive laughter of many means the secret tears of one; and you are to blame. I had rather shed a stalwart man's blood than draw a feeble man's tears. Still in repartee, sharp practice in interrupting and contradicting, is the footpad's skill in thrusting out his foot at the exact moment and sending his victim headlong to the ground. It was said of St. John Climacus: "He knew not what it was to interrupt another in conversation or to contradict." This blessed ignorance of colloquial trickery squares well with the teaching of the Holy Spirit: "In many things be as if thou wert ignorant, and hear in silence, and, withal, seeking" (Ecclus. xxxii. 12). The guide of speech is given by the Prince of the Apostles: "If any man speak, let him speak as the words of God" (Peter iv. 11).

There is a sort of joyousness that can spin a robe of rest and peace out of the gossamer topics of talk floating in the atmosphere of daily existence. Blessed is the man who can please his fellows with trifles. Blessed also is the man who is well pleased with the light exchanges of unconventional talk. More blessed than all is the man who can so please others with his lighter vein of thoughts and feelings and narrative, as to induce them to pass with him into the consideration of graver things. He is a disciple of St. Paul, who converted many a noble soul from adoring demons to the worship of the one true God by his private discourse, and who thus catalogues our topics of conversation: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever loveworthy, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline, think on these things" (Phil. iv. 8).

St. Philip Neri in praising a dear friend of his, then deceased, said: "He was accustomed to think well and speak

better of those he dealt with." Let us extol a friend for even a small excellence; and praise an enemy for even a supposed excellence. Some seem to think the praising of another to his face is a mawkish weakness, but one should be ready with praise, and make frankness to say good things and reticence to hide evil things his rule. "Open rebuke," says the Wise Man, "is better than hidden love" (Prov. xxvii. 5). Hide hate and you smother it; show love and you increase it. A Christian is the determined enemy of two things, his own praise and his neighbor's dispraise. He is also a foe of disputes. But may not conversational dispute end in instruction, or even edification? Very rarely. If you have something good to impart that you forebode may fail of a welcome, bide your time. Always to be well-mannered means always to be tactful; and good manners and prudence are the handmaids of persuasion. Persuasion is a ship without sails; it can move only on the gentle currents of peaceful conversation.

We know the predicament of honest Protestants about articles of faith. Their rule of Gospel truth is enclosed in each one's private understanding; so that two persons acknowledging each other's sincerity and information about Christ's teaching, yet differing concerning its meaning, must naturally consent that the doctrine in question is beyond their reach. Therefore they must remain in doubt or array two equally competent tribunals one against the other. This religious *impasse* of Protestantism generates doctrinal indifferentism and undermines Christian faith. In our daily intercourse, however, a kindly feeling of toleration about matters *not* of faith, but of opinion, generates a sweet conversational indifferentism, and undermines conversational dogmatism, which is abomination. We meet with men who argue the items of daily news as if they were messages from Sinai. Reasonable men say: Well, it is all a matter of opinion anyhow; let us be tolerant. Intolerance in religious doctrine is a high virtue; in ordinary matters it is offensive partisanship. A yielding mind about persons and affairs and

the current events of life, with a kindly purpose to oil the wheels of social enjoyment, is the prerequisite of a conversationalist—a being who soothes and instructs, because he esteems his intimates. “The flute and the psaltery make a sweet melody, but a pleasant tongue is above them both” (Ecclus. xl. 21).

We have said that a witty tongue is too often not a good but an evil quality. Yet read the life of such a Saint as St. Francis de Sales, or St. Philip Neri, or Venerable Joseph Cottolengo, and see how keen wit may cut so kindly as to top off the imperfections of one’s hearers without hurting the nerve of mutual affection. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings and that preacheth peace” (Is. lii. 7). What a holy messenger of God is a kindly man, who, joining in conversation, allays rancor, ends disputes, and knows how to chastise with one word and to caress with another. This is a rôle that may not be practised in all its usefulness by Tyros in the spiritual career. And sometimes, to travel with the gifts of peace into another’s mind, one must pay toll to his irritability and be called a fool. To reach the Apostle’s boast: “We are fools for Christ’s sake” (1 Cor. iv. 10), is never more easily achieved than in playing the peacemaker in acrid conversation.

Many a man who despises ostentation in dress, dresses out his conversation with ostentatious vanities. Conversation is often a peacock’s walk, where vainglory plumes and parades itself in gaudy magnificence. Christian good manners is the glory of conversation. It is both bad manners and bad religion to say: “That’s not so;” “You’re wrong;” “Don’t be silly;” “Can’t you listen to reason?” “What nonsense!” “Try to be sensible.” Christ and His Gospel guide the man who hinges his arguments thus: “Well, many think as you do about this;” “Of course there are two sides to all such questions;” “Doubtless there is much truth in what you say.” Or in the case one is maintaining an established truth: “Well, your sincerity is of course evident;” “I am sure that you will weigh my reasons.” But affa-

bility is mere show unless we have real respect for those who differ with us about disputable questions; and real patience with those who are impugning undeniable truth. Sarcasm has no place in Christian conversation.

Conversation was the roadmaker of St. Augustine's mind's vehicle during his slow transit from error to truth, and of this exceedingly valuable instrument of human felicity, social talk, he speaks thus highly in his *Confessions*: "It was the talk, the laughter, the courteous mutual deference, the common study of the masters of eloquence, the comradeship now grave, now gay, the differences that left no sting, as of a man differing with himself, the spice of disagreement which seasoned the monotony of comment. Each by turn could instruct or listen; the absent were always missed, the present always welcome. Such tokens springing from the hearts of mutual friends, and displayed by a word, a glance, an expression, by a thousand little complacencies, supply the heat which welds souls together, and makes one of many" (*Confessions*, IV., ch. viii.).

A dogmatizer of transitory views and opinions could not be sadly missed from such a circle, nor gladly welcomed into it. Of such the holy man Job complained that they hurt him—they broke him "in pieces with words" (Job xix. 2). At a show of wild beasts this sign is posted on a tiger's cage: "Do not speak to the animal while he is feeding." Might not the same be hung about the neck of some Christians? We meet with people whose humor merits the menacing words of the Wise Man who tells of a biting laughter, a "laughter of the teeth" (Ecclus. xix. 27). Religious communities are wisely guided in enforcing silence at breakfast and public reading at dinner and supper. There is a man who, while he chews his meat with his teeth, chews his neighbor with his tongue. Do not make your dinner table a dissecting table of your neighbor's character. No wonder that St. Paul warns us against mingling the pleasures of bodily appetite with the hateful joys of envy and falsehood: "Therefore let us feast not with the old leaven



.....of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. v. 8).

When to be reticent and when to be talkative, herein is holy wisdom. There are stormy intervals when one can only do well by saying nothing: "The prudent shall keep silence at that time, for it is an evil time" (Amos v. 13). Silence! It is a sacred word. Conversation may easily become an excessive indulgence and a sin of indolence. How grave a loss this may be, is seen in calculating that one-quarter of an hour wasted daily in chattering amounts to a sum total which is considerable even in a short life. On the other hand, the same daily allotment of time to profitable conversation, or to devout reading, in the course of a few years will amount to a spiritual education. "In the multitude of words there shall not want sin; but he that refraineth his lips is most wise" (Prov. x. 19). There is no worse talk than too much talk. Talk too little, and you can easily piece it out; talk too much, and you cannot lessen the harm by recalling your words, for they are no longer your own. We dare not imitate the tremendous austerities of the saints; but the avoidance of silly chatter may be our common ground of virtue with them.

Are you appalled and abashed at the thought of imitating the crucifixion of Jesus? At least you can partake both in spirit and in practise of his partiality for silence and retirement. "Jesus prayed and watched upon a mountain all night; wept often; never laughed frivolously, never spoke a silly word. When He was accused before the governor it is said of Him: 'But Jesus held His peace' (John xix. 9). When He spoke, He spoke modestly. When He made answer even to ungodly men, He made it gently" (à Kempis, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*). "He held His peace." The man who knows how to keep silence for peace' sake, for Christ's sake, is a child of God—a beatitudinous man. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. v. 9). "Hold your tongue" is a curiously expressive English idiom. He who

holds his tongue in a quarrel holds back a sword. But, alas, the tongue is as slippery as an eel. One excess of talk is alone permissible—kind words about others. This annoys only the capacious. A friend of the Venerable Libermann noticed excess in his palliation of the faults of absent persons, and said to him: "After all, Father, charity is not nonsense." "There you are mistaken," replied the man of God, "it is justice that is not nonsense, but charity may sometimes be nonsense or at least appear to be so" (*Life*, Part IV., ch. iii.).

"Speak little and sweetly, little and well, little and simply, little and kindly" (*Letters to Religious*, Mackey, p. 418), says St. Francis de Sales. Prince Von Moltke was an expert linguist, and conversed fluently in seven modern languages, but he was noted for taciturnity. A witty friend said of him: "Von Moltke can be silent in seven different languages." Be more ready to listen than to speak. Used as a balance wheel, this rule saves us from many a transgression. The blessed man Job says: "Shall not he that speaketh much, hear also? Or shall a man full of talk be justified?" (Job xi. 2.) Much talk is especially injurious for one in authority. Repress the desire of relieving the mind of the pressure of an unpleasant secret. "Be in peace with many, but let one of a thousand be thy counsellor" (Ecclus. vi. 6). A superior who readily discloses his heart-scalds is doomed. An appropriate penance for communicativeness is a brief regimen of silence, as was the practice of Job. "What can I answer, who have spoken inconsiderately? I will lay my hand upon my mouth" (Job xxxix. 34).

Those whose office calls for giving advice to others for their soul's good, may well adopt the rule of Blessed Henry Suso: "Whenever he was called to the door of the convent he applied himself to these four things: First, to receive everyone with kindliness; second, to dispatch the matter with brevity; third, to send the person away consoled; fourth, to go back again free from detachment." Often enough the conversation even of good people is a very vaudeville of talk. Not always a grave defect,

to be sure, yet the prophet warns us against buffoonery: "I sat not in the assembly of jesters" (Jer. xv. 17). The late Father Hecker was one of the pleasantest of men, and no one spent an hour in his charming company without failing to be instructed on some important spiritual matter; nor was he ever known to laugh loudly or to lose in his lightest moments his habitual air of self-restraint and recollection.

In our penitential moods we long to make conversation a medium for self-accusation. Then there arises a choice between saying nothing at all about oneself, or confessing openly one's failures and impostures. Now the sound and established opinions of spiritual writers prefer silence to self-condemnation. To say nothing good or bad of oneself is at least safe. Ostentatious humility is thinly-disguised pride. Meekness on parade has vainglory for its drill master. The rule, however, has exceptions, for self-accusation is sometimes an impulse of the Holy Ghost. Watch the results. Is real shame one of them? A longing to hide away and eat the bitter bread of self-contempt in solitude? This is good fruit of a good tree. But too often one humbles himself in his talk that his hearer may take occasion to exalt him, or his purpose is first to upbraid and then to flatter himself. Says Fénelon: "Sometimes one speaks very ill of himself out of a peculiar vanity; and then he is quite ready to be reconciled with himself: like angry lovers, who after a quarrel return to each other with double the blindness of affection." St. Francis de Sales wrote to a friend: "As to all those wordly visitors who come to you, receive them with a sweet and cheerful countenance. But in order that you may mutually give news, entertain them as if you came from the other world. For if you talk to them about the happenings of the parts in which they live, it will be no great news to them. . . . be brief when you cannot do good" (*Letters to Religious*, Mackey, p. 352). Let us note here two rules of a devout man's conversation. He is a messenger of news from another world, and he is fresh from that country where all persons and all things are entirely God's.

Secondly, he has in view the doing of good. Both prudence and love forbid a good man from conversing with people to kill time, lest the words of à Kempis comes true: "A joyful evening is followed by a sorrowful morning."

There is one kind of conversation which we never regret, the shortest but the holiest of life, our confession. It is one of the dearest privileges of our religion, this immensity of confidence and intensity of truthfulness. It is joy without trifling, it is pleasure without reaction. Prepared in silence, uttered and answered in whispers, confession resounds harmoniously amid the jubilant chant of Paradise. Confession is the holiest use of the divine faculty of speech. It is the most sacred consecration of friendship to help our direct needs, and to advance our holiest interests: a sacramental conversation.

## XXXVI.

### SIMPLICITY AND TRUTHFULNESS.

WHAT is simplicity? Understood in a spiritual sense, simplicity is inward truthfulness toward God and outward truthfulness toward man. The motive that inspires it is worship of God's attribute of truth. Simplicity is opposed to duplicity, a spiritual vice by which one's charity is not unfeigned, and one's standards of truth telling are erected by profit or convenience. Simplicity is a degree of truthfulness so high that the outward and inward life are one. When thought is singly and simply drawn toward God—when words are close fitting raiment of thought—then supernatural simplicity is achieved. Towards men simplicity is the perfection of candor, safeguarded by justice and charity and prudence; towards God it is the adoration of the sovereign loveliness of divine truth. Our Savior once cured a man of dumbness, and St. Mark tells us that "the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke right" (Mark vii. 35). Now by this the Evangelist means that the man was not only restored to the use of his tongue by our Savior's miracle, but to the right and full use of it. We may discuss profitably the figurative meaning of the words "he spoke right," that is to say, he spoke truthfully.

There are some Catholics who never tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, except when they go to confession. And even then they are apt to forget that they have told a vast number of petty lies. The Wise Man says: "The Holy Spirit of discipline will flee from the deceitful" (Wisd. i. 5), and thus condemns what is ranked as the lightest form of false-



hood, namely equivocation. The speech of man is the overflow of his heart's thoughts, for "out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaketh" (Luke vi. 45). Equivocators may not be quite falsehearted, but the bubblings up of their heart are certainly calculated to deceive. That is not speaking right. To be sure one must now and then dodge an impertinent question, yet one is never allowed to tell a lie. It is better to quarrel with a meddler than to quarrel with one's conscience. It is not right to tell a lie even to save one's life; and shall it be right to tell a lie to save one's blushes? "For thy soul be not ashamed to say the truth. For there is a shame that bringeth sin, and there is a shame that bringeth glory and grace" (Ecclus. iv. 24, 25). I had rather blush before a company of men for owning to the truth, than blush before God for being a liar.

It sometimes happens that one must get rid of a busybody, whose questions are like a fishhook cast into one's vitals. Well, then, give an evasive answer; say something that politely means: Mind your own business. That is real truth-telling, for it candidly reveals your thoughts, though they are not the thought your meddlesome friend wants you to reveal.

What is it that causes so many petty lies? Loquaciousness. Much light talk usually means many little lies. Many men (and women too) are so greedy of talk that they intrude always and everywhere. Imitate a ship master; when the wind becomes stormy he shortens sail. When you hear plenty of talk, take a reef in your sail, shorten your tongue. By so doing you will avoid petty falsehoods. "He that hateth babbling extinguisheth evil" (Ecclus. xix. 5).

It is said of St. Philip Neri: "When he had to deal with men of worldly prudence, he did not very readily accommodate himself to them. But above all he disliked having anything to do with double-faced persons, those who did not go straightforwardly to work in their dealings. He could not endure liars, and constantly warned his spiritual children to avoid them, as they would a pestilence." A person who speaks deceitfully,

even in trifling affairs, is like a bad boy who scatters banana peelings on the sidewalk. That same wise old St. Philip Neri says: "The Holy Spirit abides in candid and simple souls."

The penalty for petty and habitual untruthfulness is, first, God's strict judgment. Listen to the threatening voice of Truth incarnate: "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. xii. 36, 37). The second penalty for equivocation and all forms of deceitfulness, is bad fame among one's relatives and friends. "He is wholly unreliable," says one. "Don't trust what he says," exclaims another, and after some years this man is marked off as a liar, and receives a liar's diploma. People say of him: "He is more to be pitied than blamed; he is hardly responsible; lying has become a second nature with him." "He that speaketh lies shall not escape" (Prov. xix. 5), says the Sage in Scripture.

White lies and fibs, and equivocations, and all sorts of shabby disregard of square, candid, open-minded talk, are excessively prevalent, and are seldom made matter for a scruple. May the Lord touch all our tongues with the holy ointment of His truthfulness.

A truth-teller is one who is simply candid, avoids deception, makes his words fit his thoughts, loves the truth because it is the truth, has an acute aversion for falsehood, had rather suffer death than utter one. "The simplicity of the just man," says St. Gregory the Great, "is made a subject of derision by worldlings. The wisdom of this world hides one's real feelings by verbal trickery. It uses language to conceal thoughts. This is the wisdom that demonstrates the truth of falsehood, and shows the falsehood of truth. Men are paid for teaching this learning to children, and young people are drilled in it. Proficients in such shrewdness look down on their neighbors. Those who lack it, admire it in others and are ashamed. Unstraight-forwardness is called good manners. Simplicity of speech is

considered simple foolishness" (*Book of Morals*, quoted in Office of Confessors not Bishops). St. Gregory says further that this astuteness and diplomacy of speech is of a piece with the world's views about the Gospel generally. For the world rates as a coward and a stupid fool one who repays injuries with kindness, and curses with blessings; who gives up his property without a struggle, and shrinks from honors. On the other hand, the whole scheme of Christian life is as honest in speech as it is unselfish in act. A true Christian should imitate the simplicity, openness, truthfulness of God. Inspiration tells us that our life is built "upon the foundation of the Apostles" (Eph. ii. 20), meaning that the guidance of the Spirit of Truth is the same in our life as it was in theirs: we inherit their devotion to truth-telling as well as the truths of their teaching. Duplicity is an abomination; it is a detestable vice to any man, but in a child of Eternal Truth it is an affront to the divine Paternity Itself.

What does my interlocutor want to know from me? If prudence and charity forbid me not, he shall know what he wants to know precisely as it is in my mind. In dealing with my neighbor I must never feign or pretend. The Holy Spirit teaches: "He that speaketh sophistically, is hateful: he shall be destitute of everything" (Ecclus. xxxvii. 23). Especially shall he lack self-respect, without which life, in the long run, is not worth living. An open character is one in whom self-felicitation may approach almost to a virtue.

Christ was the Way, the straight way; the Truth, the plain truth; the Life that is lightsome: "The Life was the Light of men" (John i. 4). Pitiable indeed is a disciple of Christ who is a crooked way; an equivocal truth; whose life is a deceitful light to his fellows. Perfection may be defined as that delicacy of spiritual taste which dreads for God's sake not only whatever is in the least degree sinful, but whatever is even unbecoming in a disciple of Christ. Now a lie, as theologians affirm, is by its very nature an evil thing—*malum in se*; and it is also grossly

out of harmony with our discipleship of the Son of God. Does this not rightly place far beneath us all such meannesses as conversational equivocations and reservations? "Be not willing to make any manner of lie: for the custom thereof is not good" (Ecclus. vii. 14).

The two great crimes of this world were the disobedience of Adam and Eve and the treason of Judas. Both were heralded and ushered in by lies. The tempter said to Eve: "You shall not surely die" (Gen. iii. 4). Eve believed him because she forgot God; this, with Satan's lie, was our race's ruin. The other great crime was the lying kiss of Judas Iscariot, whose bitter guile only our Savior's mighty love could turn to account for our salvation. Of that immense liar Jesus said in the Supper room: "It were better for him if that man had not been born" (Matt. xxvi. 24). The Evangelist shows how these two supreme liars were one: "And Satan entered into Judas" (Luke xxii. 3). Satan was a murderer from the beginning, and he stood not in the truth; because truth is not in him. "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John viii. 44). The Prince of the Apostles tells us the end of Judas, Satan's masterpiece in his dreadful art: "Judas. . . . being hanged, burst assunder in the midst and all his bowels gushed out!" (Acts i. 18.)

Every evil thing has a lie in its heart. Apostasy and sacrilege and blasphemy each proclaim a lie in the face of heaven and earth. Anger and hatred and revenge and pride are ambushed behind a perfect screen of lies. Lust wheedles and betrays its victim with lies. Avarice and theft are own brothers of lying, while intemperance revels in a delirium of lying. Perjury is the atmosphere of many a lawsuit, and is entirely absent from very few of them—perjury, which is a solemn lie, a public lie, one that calls on the God of truth to be its sponsor for the ruin of a hated antagonist. How hateful is a liar to that God to Whom we say in our act of faith: "Thou canst neither deceive nor to be deceived." Most evil deeds must have this ugly-



ness painted by lies into the semblance of virtue, as a corpse might be rouged into the semblance of a living man. Often men fall so helplessly into the meshes of evil works, that, as they say, they must lie to make a living. Vast is that company of whom the Beloved Disciple says: "Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers. . . . and everyone that loveth and maketh a lie" (Apoc. xxii. 15).

No wonder that Holy Writ so often binds into one the two supreme and adorable attributes of truth and mercy in the Deity: "Praise the Lord all ye nations, praise Him all ye people. For His mercy is confirmed upon us, and the truth of the Lord remaineth forever" (Ps. xxvi. 1, 2). With all our untruthfulness, we still have a divinely implanted loathing for a liar. Men who are untruthful themselves will shoot another who calls them liars. Only a saint can quite overcome his wrath, when he discovers that he has been lied to.

Lying is the common stock, the raw material of venial sins of many varieties. Just as truthfulness is the badge of all earnest seekers after close divine friendship. "Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle? Or who shall rest on thy holy hill?" the royal prophet asks. "He that speaketh truth in his heart; who hath not used deceit in his tongue" (Ps. xiv. 1-3). Alas, lying is so nearly natural that it is most easily taught and hardly ever quite unlearned again. One loses admiration for truthfulness as the faculty of distinguishing between truth and falsehood grows dim. No vice is more likely to become a rooted habit; there is none that saps more fatally the noble quality of earnestness in well doing. The two constituents of natural happiness, self-respect and the respect of others, are insensibly lessened and lowered, and too often altogether forfeited. A man who is a living lie cannot love his better self. When lying is grave it is a tornado that tears up the tree by the roots. When it is a venial habit it is a pest of worms devouring the tree's foliage. No wonder then that true servants of God are ready to suffer heroically to remain truthful in conversation, and even go



to an extreme in truthfulness that seems the very uttermost scrupulosity. A true man's tongue should be like an official interpreter in a court of law: sworn to convey to all listeners the exact meaning of the heart. A true man is straightforward; when there is question of sincerity of speech he is indifferent to what people may say of him.

Tepidity and all spiritual cowardice breeds lying and hypocrisy of a defined sort, for a lukewarm soul patronizes the fervent and would be considered as one of them. Now every attempt at disguise is in the nature of a lie, and all petty duplicities are venial sins. Few men are absolutely sincere even with God, and if they are it is because they have known how to profit by confession, which is the divine shrine of material truth-telling. We seldom meet a man who is willing to be known to others as he is known to himself, except to his Father confessor. Dissimulation is wrong in everyone, but it is positively the bane of the half-hearted Christian. It is impossible to exaggerate how much it hinders perfection, for all sin, be it the least or the greatest, is flavored with lying. The Psalmist exclaims: "I have accounted all the sinners of the earth prevaricators" (Ps. cxviii. 119). Hence à Kempis when he prays for close union with the deity, names the unitive force of God as mingled truth and love. "O Truth, my God, make me one with Thee in everlasting love" (*Imitation*, Book I., ch. iii.). Many of the martyrs for Christ were martyrs just for truthfulness. A mental reservation would have saved their lives. One little word of equivocation? No, rather God's infinite honor. Of them St. John heard a voice in his vision: "These were purchased from among men, the first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth there was found no lie; for they are without spot before the throne of God" (Apoc. xiv. 45). Every virtue loves the company of pure candor, and every vice sidles up to a lie. We have dwelt upon the sin of petty lying to illustrate our Lord's doctrine, that "he that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater; and he that is unjust in that which is little, is

unjust also in that which is greater" (Luke xvi. 10). This may be the comparison of venial and mortal sinfulness, yet it is possible that our Lord meant to compare rather the lighter and the grosser sorts of venial sin, the one merely weakness, the other transgressions done in deliberateness.

Many men live long lives, and are never called on to perform heroic virtue, but no man ever lived that was not called on to do some little virtuous act every hour of his life. Of these smaller acts of holiness, habitual candor furnishes a generous quota. To live is to talk, and the charm of talk is charity within, and truthfulness without. A passing fervor of spirit may enable us to do an act of heroism. But the motives of it may be mixed. The grandeur of the sacrifice, the dramatic splendor of the deed, the rare and splendid privilege of passing out of the commonplace into the regions of magnificent virtue—some or all of these easily become motives which jostle the direct thought of God. But to buckle down monotonously twenty times a day and grapple with a tendency to exaggerate in our talk, is an achievement which rises unto, not an heroic act, but an heroic condition. To take and do God's will as gladly in little things as in great, is conduct wholly divine. The suppression of our weaknesses, the extinction of our pettinesses in unvarying fidelity to God's good pleasure, this is heroism, sublime in God's eyes, though hidden from human gaze.

A submarine boat of the French navy was once lost under peculiar circumstances. In an experiment trip she was guided under the water, but never came to the surface again. Twelve men lost their lives in her. When she was raised and the machinery examined, it was found that a little gravel had caused one of the pistons to jam. The least pinch of sand in a great engine, everything must stop instantly to clean it out. So acts an anxious Christian after venial sin. Stop! Examine! Repent! Do penance! Be very guarded in the future. If he perceives that attachment to his own opinion causes petty untruthfulness, he cleans it all out by his examens and his penances; he lubricates

the whole apparatus of his soul with the charity of Christ Crucified, Who said: 'For this was I born, for this came I into the world, that I might give testimony of the truth. Everyone that is of the truth, heareth My voice" (John xviii. 37). O Jesus, Thou eternal witness of truth, teach me to be open and sincere. Expel deceitfulness and equivocation from my nature by Thy fiery justice. Chastise me for every littlest exaggeration with bitter remorse. Enforce upon me Thy rule that it is never allowable to speak against the truth.

## XXXVII.

### THE CONVERSION OF AMERICA.

"THERE is no meaning of the word Catholic that does not apply to me." Such was the boast of a friend of ours, made many years ago, and not untruthfully. A public-spirited man uttered it, one looking for opportunities to do good, one who had been concerned in making many converts.

What kind of Catholics do we need to-day? We need that kind. We need energetic men and women, seeking new means of doing good without despising the old ones; quietly at peace with God interiorly, strenuously at work for their neighbor exteriorly; easily joined to others in organized works of zeal, yet just as quickly venturing all alone upon approved activities.

Such a one says to himself: Think of all the sin around me! the ignorance, the misfortune; can I sit down comfortably and never offer to help it? To him the profession of piety is a mockery, unless his soul rises superior to self, especially in matters of race and family and class. "Those words, *mine and thine* (to quote St. Francis de Sales), have little significance to a true Christian in any order of existence; but in religious matters they are positively hateful to him." When he goes to confession, his joy is shadowed by the thought of the multitudes absent from this holy shrine of pardon and peace. The joy of his communions is tinged with self-reproach, because he has not sufficiently heeded the injunction of the Master of the banquet: "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the blind, and the lame. . . . go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in" (Luke xiv. 21-23).

Spiritual writers tell us that the heart of man is great enough to contain the infinite God. If my heart contains only a handful

of God's creatures; merely my own family and a little circle of friends, surely it is not a Catholic heart.

"There is no Sleepy Hollow in the Vineyard of the Lord," a zealous priest once exclaimed to his people. Yet some Catholics think the vineyard of the Church is a quiet out-of-the-way nook for peaceful repose. Such souls are often shaken out of this religious torpor by the onset of passionate temptation, and are carried away into the captivity of the evil one. There are many Catholics who make their faith a sort of hammock under a shady tree in midsummer, in which they swing comfortably, viewing complacently the way-worn travelers passing along the hot and dusty road of error.

Little do these laggard Christians dream that every spiritual good is first their own to enjoy and then the property of others, to be imparted to them freely and generously. "Freely [that is to say, gratuitously] have you received, freely give" (Matt. x. 8), was the Master's charge to all His disciples. The heritage you enjoy so selfishly is the common property of all men, primarily of those within reach of your voice, your pen, your example. No man can claim to be a brother of Jesus Christ to the exclusion of the rest of the divine brotherhood, which includes every human soul. The Catholic who hugs the truth up to himself alone, is not worthy of it.

For a Christian to look with indifference upon the vast multitudes of men and women going straight on to hell is criminal. Such positive and criminal indifference hardly exists in pious souls. But negative indifference certainly does. Many weekly communicants never consider the state of men's souls outside their own little circle. Tauler teaches that true spirituality embraces with deep affection, nay, with painful interest, the souls of Turks and of Jews, and of heathen nations over sea. The "point of view" of a true Christian is that of his divine Master, Who died for all mankind, and Who sent His Apostles to all nations for all time, and endowed them with all power from on high to save men's souls (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20).



At the hour of death, that awful moment when the iron hand of justice seizes us, God grant us some dear memory of having personated Christ our Savior to wandering and perishing souls.

"Charity covereth a multitude of sins" (1 Peter iv. 8), is both a saying of inspiration and a universal proverb. The charity of the convert-maker is a compassion for souls, bearing fruit in Paradise. What pity is so like to Christ's as the pain of heart of a Christian over the pauperism of an infidel? What love in the wide world of holy charity can compare with love of souls? St. Paul speaking of some of the men and women who labored with him for others' salvation, says, "Whose names are written in the book of life" (Phil. iv. 3). And in another place, addressing his converts, he reckons up the items of his own future blessedness, and exclaims: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glory? Are not you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" (1 Thess. ii. 19.)

We read with surprise in Newman's autobiography, that when he was ordained an Anglican minister he had a distinct intention to devote his life to missions among the heathen—that powerful intellect, that leader of men! He was at that time a young scholar at the University of Oxford, a fellow of a famous college, already a brilliant writer, a resistless persuader of men. If this be laudable, this longing of Newman's heart to save the outcast members of the human race, this zeal in the soul of one of the greatest men of his age, it is also suggestive of his final vocation. We sincerely believe that to reward him for that self-denying love of mankind God gave him the true faith, and made him, personally and by his writings, the foremost missionary to non-Catholics since the days of St. Francis de Sales. He longed to bury himself for Christ's sake among the lowest races of men, that he might save them. God placed him upon the highest plane of Christian civilization, that he might lead the way for the conversion of the imperial races who speak the English tongue.

Scarcely a day passes but offers opportunity to say a plain word for the cause of Christ. The air is full of objections to religion, and every objection should be met on the spot and refuted; or, at least, protested against. If anyone denies in your hearing the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, the divinity of Christ, the inspiration of Scripture, it is your duty at once to contradict him, and to affirm these fundamental truths; it is a great honor to do so. Let no man assail the truth of God in your presence with impunity. It is a shame that the apostles of the prince of liars are commonly the aggressors in such matters, and the apostles of the Prince of Truth dare not so much as lift their eyebrows by way of contradiction.

Many a convert owes his faith and his salvation to the ready response, bold and free, of some obscure Catholic to the sneer of a Protestant bigot. It is amazing that men and women can piously love the truth and the practice of religion, and live along from day to day among blatant infidels, dumb as brutes in face of foul attacks on the Church. What coward is so mean as a pious coward? The Catholic of to-day should be a great-souled Christian. "I ran in the way of Thy commandments," says the Psalmist to his Maker, "when Thou didst enlarge my heart" (Ps. cxviii. 32).

Remember that in dealing with non-Catholics about religion you have a bitter dose to administer. It is hard for proud souls to sit down and be taught as little children. None of our Savior's sayings is harder than this: "Amen, I say to you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter into it" (Mark x. 15). Another class resists for the sake of the liberty of the flesh. Steeped in sensual indulgence, the vapors of sin obscure the light of reason; the very axioms of common morality are often doubted, even openly denied. Even under the most favorable circumstances, the humility and the self-restraint of the Gospel can win but a scanty victory. Now if the unwelcome message be delivered with a harsh voice and a scowling face, or with a magisterial air, or, again, with a pretense

of superior learning, however plainly true it may sound, your hearers will be tempted to resent it. The preference of every soul in error is rather to defy his teacher than to argue with him. Once you get a non-Catholic so much as to exchange religious views with you calmly, you have gained half a victory.

No man—so it would seem—fully appreciates the worth of his own soul, until he has dealt in the souls of others. If you would learn the dignity of your own immortality, observe the ruin of another immortal being. Mark closely the interest of the nobler spirits about you in your own spiritual welfare, if you would rise from an earthly to a heavenly valuation of your eternal destiny.

There is no law more universal or more sacred, than that which conditions each man's salvation on the sincerity of his will to save another man. Therefore the ministry of saving souls belongs to all orders of Christians. The grace to save men pervades the entire mystical body of Christ, His Church, just as one's blood flows as well through the littlest capillary arteries at the extremities, as through the great channels next the heart. The grace of zeal for souls is not the monopoly of popes, bishops and priests. The stream of the apostolic vocation pours abroad in the Church into every Christian's consciousness, giving to each one his proper measure of apostolic grace and of apostolic responsibility.

To love God is to be zealous for souls. "Zeal springs from love," says St. Augustine. Among the essential accompaniments of sanctifying grace, is a divinely-implanted longing to draw souls nearer to God. One dare not feel alone in the enjoyment of the grace of God. It ought to fill us with shame and remorse that for years we have selfishly ignored the brotherly relation between ourselves and other men, a kinship established by the grace of Catholic faith. We ignore it interiorly by neglect of prayers for conversions, exteriorly by coldly passing in and out of the company of non-Catholic friends without uttering a single word of Catholic truth.

Let us repeat: to know ourselves with God's knowledge is to know our neighbor's spiritual needs with God's sympathy. In order to save oneself it is necessary to be concerned with the salvation of others. "Hast thou saved a soul?" exclaims St. Augustine; "then thou hast predestinated thy own soul."

There is scarcely a grown-up Catholic in America of whom it may not be truly said: If he be worthy of a happy death he will secure that unspeakable favor for others. Of course, this is primarily true of all parents and teachers, masters and mistresses, brothers and sisters, as well as of many others who have close and loving friends. But it is also true of the whole multitude of the faithful, though in a remoter degree. For who that lives among unbelievers but may often command their attention to a strong word of Catholic doctrine? Who that is no more than an Easter communicant but can find some darkened soul ready to listen to the joyful tale of the peace and joy in the Holy Ghost born of a worthy communion? Who that is more than a nominal Catholic but can turn his kindness to the poor, his compassion for the sick, his sympathy with the bereaved, into apostolic channels? All that is necessary to make a good Catholic a zealous one is a clear understanding of brotherly love. How pitiful to behold really good living Christians quite ignoring the eternal downfall of their close acquaintances, and neither by prayer nor word nor work intervening to save them from hell. Obliviousness to the worth of men's souls is one of the commonest weaknesses of practical Catholics. May we not rather call it a vice than a weakness? No one can long remain a fervent Christian who does not interest himself in the saving of souls. All other virtues together do not make the sum total of Christian character until Apostolic charity be added to them. The perfection of the just man and the virtue of zeal for the conversion of sinners and unbelievers are inseparably joined together.

What matter for thanksgiving it is to have a mind so enlightened as to understand God's miracles of mercy in the life, death and glory of His Son, and to believe in them without a



single misgiving: "Giving thanks to God the Father, Who hath made us worthy to be partakers of.....the saints in light" (Col. i. 12). Cardinal Newman speaks of "the dismay and disgust which I felt in consequence of the first dreadful misgiving" that Anglicanism was not any part of God's true Church. But after he had become a Catholic, indeed many years afterwards, he speaks of the peace and joy in the Holy Ghost that had been continuously granted him with the true faith: "I have had perfect peace and contentment. I never have had one doubt..... It was like coming into port after a rough sea; and my happiness on that score remains to this day without interruption" (*Apologia*, Part VII.).

So says every convert. It is not so much that he has gained peace and possesses it, but rather that peace has gained him and taken possession of him, peace surpassing all understanding and overflowing all measure of joy.

All Christians are familiar with that joy of pardon which sweetly invades our hearts after confession, the sense of forgiveness and of reconciliation, a miracle of gentle sweetness and peace. But it is reserved for comparatively few to know the ecstasy of conversion. The Catholic Christian Church of Jesus Christ! It is mine at last. What was a superstitious dream has changed into a heavenly revelation of truth. And the zealous Catholic who makes converts, he it is who obtains that joy for his neophyte. It is at his command that the convert beholds the blessed vision of eternal peace, saying with St. Peter: "Believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable" (1 Peter i. 8).

"Now there remaineth a rest for the people of God" (Heb. iv. 9). Faith is that rest, the first and last, the temporal and eternal rest of God's friends. It is enjoyed in varying degrees by all Catholics, according to one's spirit of inquiry and of love. But especially is faith a harbor of peace to a convert, for he has battled his way into it through the stress and storm of opposition, doubt, misgiving. "This is my rest for ever and ever: here shall I dwell because I have chosen it" (Ps. cxxxi. 14).



Some of our readers have been privileged to visit a hospital of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis. They have seen those happy nuns, who bear a red cross on their scapular, serving the outcasts of humanity with Christian unselfishness, and asking never a penny in compensation. But do you know that they are, besides, efficient convert makers? A sick bed is a school of God's truth, and its lessons are well interpreted by these heroines of God's charity to the poor.

The saintly foundress of this community, the Venerable Mother Frances Schervier, while called by God primarily to relieve bodily distress, ever looked to the highest spiritual aims. Her soothing of bodily ills served universally to introduce the saving truths of repentance, to wretched and abandoned Catholics, and of conversion to the faith of non-Catholics. Her biographer, Father Jeiler, O.S.F., relates how she never asked questions about race or creed of any applicants for help, nor was any partiality ever shown by her or her Sisters, except an increase of gentle sympathy when helping Protestants, Jews or infidels. These "saw embodied in her and her order the doctrines of the Church in their noblest form, and she was in her own person the strongest polemical argument possible." She was Catholicity clothed with the charity of God. Avoiding a rude and tactless intrusion of her beloved religion, she yet found opportunities to suggest and insinuate its sacred dogmas, meantime secretly appealing for aid to the Holy Spirit to infuse into the souls she addressed those interior sentiments which are always the most needful for conversion. This valiant woman had a special love for our Redeemer's apostate fellow-countrymen, the Jews, and one-third, at least, of her many converts were members of that hard-souled people. She could say in all truth with St. Paul, that she felt them to be yet and forever the Lord's nearest of kin, "of whom is Christ, according to the flesh;" and she shared the feeling of the Apostle: "The will of my heart, indeed, and my prayer to God, is for them unto salvation" (Rom. x. 1). And what is true of her and her com-

munity is equally true of all of our religious sisterhoods. They may be ranked among our most efficient convert makers.

The power behind the throne is the strong statesman guiding a weak monarch. The power behind the platform of the missionary is prayer—that, as a matter of fact, is the moving force of his lectures to non-Catholics. That is the religious energy of which the Apostle spoke, when he said: “The kingdom of God is not in speech but in power” (1 Cor. iv. 20).

The arrow that is well feathered speeds straight. The lightest and weakest thing about an arrow is its feathering; and this is placed farthest away from the point, which is so sharp and hard, and which must win deep into the mark. Yet these little bits of feather hold the arrow true to the aim of the archer. So the lecturer that is helped by the gentle prayer of his silent co-apostles, wins home to men’s hearts. The prayers of his friends and of his cause’s friends keep his motives pure, elevate him above the love of applause, guide him to the Church’s plain doctrine rather than to his own pet theories. More: the favors obtained by these hidden Apostles often include the bodily health of the preacher, and enable him to strive manfully against the strain upon the nerves and the dullness of fatigue resulting from his strenuous labor. The whisper of secret prayer for conversions gives clarion force to the public discourse for Catholic truth. None of us should forget that conversions seemingly due to the most attractive preaching are really due to prayer. All conversions are mainly due to prayer.

“This kind [of demon] can go out by nothing but by prayer and fasting” (Mark ix. 28). When shall we learn the convert-making force of a devout soul’s prayers and sacrifices? Self-denial and communion with God are the secret causes of conversions. The concentration of personal holiness upon the Catholic apostolate is its crying need.

This especially is the case when the difficulties encountered pass beyond the ordinary. Then, perhaps, whole hours of prayer must be given, and pain of body must be offered up, as

an essential condition of success. "Believest thou this?" If one aspires to more than commonplace usefulness to non-Catholics he must become a mortified man, and be full of prayer, or his aspirations will not be realized. And he must enlist the prayers of devout friends abundantly. This method, which may be called the intensive one, is sure of success.

St. Anthony buried himself in a desert so remote that no living being could reach it without extreme difficulty. St. Philip Neri, on the other hand, lived by preference amid the jostling throngs of a crowded city, and courted the company of all. But the solitary saint was ever praying for conversions, and the busy one robbed his nights of sleep that he might pray in solitude for the same end. Sometimes St. Philip's bedchamber was the scene of his apostolate; sometimes the street corner; cloister he had none. "Rest assured," he said, "that nothing brings so much consolation and sweetness in prayer as leaving Christ in contemplation to find Him in the saving of immortal souls." When St. Anthony heard that Arianism had broken out in Alexandria, he journeyed day and night to the city, and exchanged the holy quiet of the desert's cloister for the hard conflicts of controversy, and with miraculous success. So these great saints prayed and worked with the mingled spirit of the quiet solitary, and the busy missionary.

Often our Eucharistic Savior remains in a town for years with no trophies of His loving warfare but the souls of born Catholics, His easiest conquest. Our outside brethren love religious truth, they long to have a clear view of it and a settled mind about it; and yet we do not invite them to Christ on our altars, or to that divinely formed society which alone can enlighten and sanctify them. "Why is this?" asks a very distinguished Catholic writer, treating of Catholic apathy. "The reason is that Jesus is in this world in the hands of His servants. As a rule, He will not act and work except so far as the devotion and sacrifice of pastors and people carry Him. As long as He is suffered to remain an unknown Presence, shut up, scantily and

formally honored, perhaps neglected, He is in the world as if He were not in it. He is the sun, but the clouds and vapors of indifference obstruct His shining.....It is where the blessed Sacrament is devoutly honored by priest and people that conversions are made" (Bishop Hedley's Retreat, 291). How better can we honor our Sacramental Savior, than by bringing to His feet worshippers drawn from the mass of ignorance and delusion everywhere around us?

Among the hermits of the Egyptian desert was Serapion, surnamed the Sindonite, from the linen wrapping which on an occasion of much importance formed his only garment. Having spent many years among the solitaries, Serapion was moved by the Holy Ghost to leave his hermitage and go to the voluptuous city of Corinth; and there he sold himself a slave to a heathen magician, carefully secreting the twenty gold pieces he got as the price of his liberty. Doing the humblest work of a slave, he gradually won his way into his owner's heart, preached Christ to him, finally converted him and his whole family. His master gave him his liberty; Serapion restored him the original purchase money—and departed.

Next he sold himself to a rich pagan, gave the price to a poor widow, and in course of time converted this, his second master and his household to the Catholic faith—again received his liberty and again disappeared. He was now well dressed in warm garments, the season being winter and very cold. One after another of his garments did he give away as he came across shivering beggars, till at last he had no covering but his innermost linen underwear. In the evening he was met by some compassionate Christians who gazed in wonder upon the old man, so dignified and gentle, and yet so woefully despoiled. "Who has robbed thee?" one of them asked, as he led him into the warm shelter of his home. The Sindonite answered by holding up a little book, which he had always with him. "It was this book that did it," he exclaimed. It was the book of the Four Gospels.

The Gospel of Christ is the greatest robber that ever was. Serapion is but one of a countless multitude whom its maxims have stripped of home and country and goods and liberty, even of life itself, mercilessly despoiling them of all earthly things, but yet enriching them with an overflowing abundance of eternal treasures. Until the Gospel robs us of self, we know not the sweet joy of zeal for souls. I must allow the Church of God to rob me of all personal narrowness, before I can claim to be fully entitled to her favors. When the graces of Holy Communion leave me stripped of self, and make me hungry for the eternal welfare of my non-Catholic neighbors, it has done its divine work in me; then and not before.



## XXXVIII.

### THE MYSTERY OF PERSEVERANCE.

ST. DEICOLUS was an Irish monk, a disciple of St. Columbanus. Amidst all his austerities, the joy and peace of his soul shone out in his countenance. St. Columbanus once said to him: "Brother, why art thou always smiling?" He answered in simplicity: "Because no one can take my God from me." The reader will mark the note of perseverance in this holy answer. When we possess God there is one thing more to be desired, though only one: to possess Him forever.

And here begins the mystery, for it is a dogma of Catholic faith that our perseverance cannot be known to us with entire certainty.

Among the Canons of the Council of Trent there is one (No. xvi. on Justification) visiting anathema on the claim of absolutely certain knowledge of final perseverance, unless it be imparted by special divine revelation. Meantime, in a previous explanation of this dogma, the Council combines with it the obligation of the hope of salvation, which is to be firm and courageous, resting upon the divine promises and the actual movements of grace shown in good works of both the interior and exterior life of a Christian. From this simultaneous condemnation of false assurance and praise of firm and courageous confidence, we perceive that it is not so much the feeling as the conviction of perseverance that Holy Church would censure.

Certainty, therefore, of a happy death is not granted, certainly, that is to say, in the Calvinistic sense, absolute and forming an essential part of the grace of justification. That is an error of the deadliest sort, breeding fanaticism and paralyzing holy fear of God. Yet if I cannot know my perseverance cer-

tainly enough to presume upon it, yet I can trust it surely enough to work out my salvation with courage, yea, even if it be to work it out with fear and trembling (Phil. ii. 12). My salvation is God's joy, His triumph, and His glory. That I know with absolute certainty. Furthermore, God's present graces are one and all introductory to His final ones: "He who hath begun a good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. i. 6). One of the graces He has already granted me is a steady purpose to persevere, and that from the highest motive—loving trust in His goodness. I am now and I continue currently to be conscious of His drawing me towards perseverance; and "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. xi. 29). If I am forbidden to overtrust my final success, I am none the less forbidden to undertrust the divine purpose finally to save me. Midway between the great virtues of faith and love stands glorious hope.

Perseverance is not, therefore, a tormenting mystery: yet it is truly the great mystery of life. It causes us to distrust ourselves, and all mystified about ourselves to become all trustful of God. The least grain of uncertainty about our eternal destiny makes us watchful. We then hold fast to saving religious conditions, such as the love of Jesus Christ, fondness for prayer, a high routine of the sacraments, a sense of duty about good reading and good company: divinely good in themselves, these holy things become guarantees of permanent divine friendship. It is a profitable mystery, for it makes us value present opportunities of grace and virtue all the more because future ones are out of reach. All life is strenuous and vigilant in proportion to our appreciation of the fact that there must ever be a shade of doubt about a happy death; that it is a grace separate and apart from all others; that it is granted for no reason that we have anything to do with, anything, at least, of a causative or meritorious nature.

One solution of the difficulty is, that we can pray for perseverance, can and must do so; and that the very inclination to pray is a dim and distant promise of the mysterious grace itself.

And it is added, that prayer for perseverance will be granted as inevitably as prayer for any other spiritual need. But the answer is patent: the prayer will be efficacious only if itself be persevering. Turn the problem which way you please, this mystic glass reveals God's mastery over our end as absolute as His mastery over our beginning. Not of the origin and destiny of the universe can the Lord more truly say: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end" (Apoc. i. 8), than of the origin and destiny of each human soul. Upon Him, then, do we rely, and in doing so we pray, and confess, and receive Communion. Consider again the practice of prayer; by it we cannot *merit* the grace of perseverance in the absolute meaning of the term. "Yet," says St. Augustine, "this gift can be *suppliantly* merited; it can be obtained by praying for it." But to this relation of prayer to a happy end we shall return again.

The beginning of a good work has this enduring excellence, that it holds within it, as it were in solution, a quality of self-reproduction. This by means of the constant warmth of love is distilled into tokens of perseverance. But, after all, it is only the end that crowns the work; it alone crowns the worker. Mary was full of grace at Nazareth, nay, confirmed in grace from her immaculate conception. But the Mother of Sorrows is the fullness of the divine motherhood, for it was her Son's sorrow that redeemed us. Perseverance is a grander work than even the noble act of original consecration to a devout life, for whereas the origin contains the end only in purpose and potency, the end contains the origin in its fullest development.

No fruit of a tree is ripe unless it has ripe seeds for producing other fruit trees. No virtue is mature unless it has within it seeds "after its own kind which may have seed in itself upon the earth" (Gen. i. 11). The seed of virtue is a living purpose to practise more virtue—it is both a deed and a promise. The new seed may be slow in germinating, but St. Frances de Sales, in warning us against faint-heartedness, says that it can happen that only a quarter of an hour before death, we shall find ourselves

freed from some imperfection against which we have vainly struggled for a lifetime.

In this state of mystery death gains and life loses in the division of our endeavors, or better said, eternity gains and time loses. Listen to a saint's estimate of life and death: "The true servants of God," says St. Philip Neri, "take life patiently and death eagerly." One of us will say: "O the sadness of life, O the gladness of death." Yet if the saint's patience and eagerness be rated equal, another might say: "O the gladness of life, O the gladness of death;" and thus life and death are unified. Herein is one of the foretastes of the grace of perseverance.

St. Francis de Sales defines perseverance to be "the sequence and combination of virtues." True life is a golden chain of graces, every grace a link of love. When first placed, it is grasped by the link going before, and it lies open to grasp in turn the link following after. What though the open link may fall off, it is left open that it may receive another, not to be lost itself by the cessation of courageous resolve. Virtue is fruitful of virtue.

"The threshing of your harvest shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time; and you shall eat your bread to the full" (Lev. xxvi. 5).

One season of innocence generates longings for another, and this is invariable in God's changes of the spiritual seasons. Only it must be noticed, that whereas the farmer is glad if a good crop is followed by an equally good one, we are certain of a better and ever better harvest of virtue and of joy and of peace as the years go on. Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after another. A quarter horse can win the whole race of life, for quarter after quarter is won till the whole course is won. The question of enduring to the end is just this: Can I renew my daily purpose of loving Christ each succeeding day? Perseverance is rather a matter of renewal of brief efforts than of endurance of extended strain.

Thus does persistent renewal receive the crown of final suc-



cess. "I have said: Now I have begun" (Ps. lxxvi. 11), until at last by ever freshening purpose and action, I win out and say: Now I have done. Remember, too, that God is ever saying the selfsame words about us and repeating His favors to us, incessantly renewing our graces, constantly pardoning our relapses, even as if He had never favored us or pardoned us before. I am often warned never to forget my weakness. Yet the Psalmist heartens me, bidding me say: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all that He hath done for thee" (Ps. cii. 2).

That God should now love me, and that He now loves me as God alone can love, with a divine sincerity, an infinite tenderness; and that meanwhile He has it in purpose to weaken that love by degrees or snatch it away by a sudden wrench; and that even now as he cherishes me "as the apple of His eye" (Zach. ii. 8), He none the less is preparing to make an example of me in hell—this is a thought I will not tolerate; it is a satanic thought. If my end shall be ruin, it cannot be from God. Who then shall be responsible for my eternal downfall? who but my own self.

Among the marks of final perseverance, none equals a life of perfection. The ordinary Christian in the state of grace, is too often like a man who, having been deeded a fine new house, walks around it and admires it, and proudly points it out to his friends. But dare he ask them to go into it? for it is an empty house, with not a chair or table or bed, not a morsel of food, all cold, silent and vacant, indeed a house that is not a home. Such is the grace of God when it rests idle in the soul, the mere gift of His favor, unimproved, little appreciated, religion boasted of and not cultivated, a friendship that receives everything and returns nothing. Not so the generous heart, who having received all from God would give God all in return by a life of perfection.

As a proposition in dialectics, perseverance is a deep mystery, but not so much so as a problem of life. For mortal sin alone can damn one, and the whole of the life of a fervent Christian is a battle against even venial sin. What keeps me out of venial sin removes me far away from the danger of mortal sin: a steady



purpose, a high resolve of perfect virtue, daily renewed, cherished as a point of holy honor.

A true Christian may be puzzled in reconciling God's imperative graces with man's inalienable freedom—but as Newman says, "a thousand difficulties do not make one doubt." Every Christian may win the doctorate of a happy death by leading a life that shrinks in horror from the most trifling imperfection, and eagerly seeks the least opportunities of doing good. Whether he knows it or not, he is under the spell of final perseverance. To such souls does the Lord refer when He says: "Father, the glory Thou hast given Me, I have given to them" (John xvii. 22).

What are the more particular marks of perseverance? If none can be infallible, many possess a consoling reassurance in moments of despondency. The marks are at the same time the means of perpetual constancy, and let the reader note by preference the more interior ones and "be zealous for the better gifts" (1 Cor. xii. 31).

These are all forms of love, that sovereign virtue which the Bridegroom associates with death: "For strong as death is love" (Cant. viii. 6). Let this life and death sentiment flow directly from my human heart into the human heart of Christ, and through that one exclusive channel into the Divinity. Constant love of His Passion and Death forecasts a death in His divine embrace. With this supreme virtue of love is associated a simple-minded faith in His Gospel and His Church. To faith is joined as a twin virtue that one among the divine virtues which is the *peculium* of perseverance, hope "which confoundeth not" (Rom. v. 5)—no, not even at the last dread venture of changing life here for life hereafter. The mainstay of a Christian when his spirits are dulled by looking into the mystery of perseverance, is, first, his love for the Son of God Incarnate; and, second, the sense of his own utter unworthiness. These joined together are the secret and intimate comfort of the soul. No man ever loved Jesus Christ in vain, except one who allowed

self-righteousness gradually to substitute itself for humble confidence in God.

This leads us to consider humility, which, with its twin sister obedience, ranks high among the signs forecasting perseverance. It generates that self-distrust that never slumbers lest the enemy surprise it. "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. x. 12). This caution develops with the growth of every other virtue, as indeed is needful. For, says Newman in his terrible sermon on *Perseverance in Grace*: "The holier a man is, and the higher in the kingdom of heaven, so much the greater need has he to look carefully to his footing, lest he stumble and be lost. And," he adds, "a deep conviction of this necessity has been the sole preservation of the saints."

Whatever other virtue wins grace, humility alone preserves it, and enjoys at last the honor of crowning the Christian's life with perseverance. Of the moral virtues humility and obedience are the blended forces of the Christian's constancy, and take high place in his scheme of life and death. Pride leads sinners to obduracy, and tepid souls to spiritual slovenliness. Humility is open-eyed to one's own faults, and is not ashamed to obey lawful authority even in trifles—a momentous advantage in the struggle. Once St. Anthony of the Desert saw in a vision the whole world so thickly covered with snares, that it seemed hardly possible to set down a foot without being caught. At this sight he cried out, trembling: "Who, O Lord, can escape them all?" A voice answered him: "A man shod with humility, O Anthony."

The comfort of prayer is both a means and a mark of perseverance. For, if even on the verge of desperation I cry towards heaven: "Abba! Father!" (Rom. viii. 15) the feebleness of my voice is strengthened by that of God's own spirit within me. But it may be objected: Art thou not haunted by thy past sins, nor aware of thy present cowardice? To-morrow belongs not to thee; God will perhaps refuse thee His Spirit to-morrow. To-morrow thou shalt cry out not to God but to thy

own flesh and to the world, and with a voice inspired by the evil one. But to these gloomy murmurings I answer: If to-morrow belongs not to me, it yet does belong to my God, to the same heavenly Father to Whom I cry to-day with words inspired by His Spirit. To-day I cry out in all confidence to my Redeemer for the renewal of His love to-morrow. The answer is sure: "Because he hoped in Me, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he hath known My name. He shall cry to Me, and I will hear him. I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him, and I will glorify him" (Ps. xc. 14, 15). When I pray for perseverance, I simply pray that I may always love. Is not this a hard prayer for the God of love to refuse? Wilt thou not *permit* me, O Lord, to appreciate Thy love-worthiness? May I not *desire* to pay adoration to Thine infinite goodness now and forever more? May I not confidently trust that "Thy mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord, unto length of days?" (Ps. xxii. 6.)

Another mark of perseverance is the spirit and practice of penance. We speak of superficial piety, and this frothy religion is most often shown in early relapses from the friendship of God after receiving the sacraments—an alarming token of a bad end. Surface holiness is nothing else but shallow contrition for sin. It is like the "strippings" or surface layers of a slate quarry. These shine bright, but they fade and are brittle, and offer poor resistance to the weather. Go down deep and you get the slates colored by ages of nature's action, of enduring fibre and ever faithful color. Go down deep into your heart for God's best work of the graces of contrition. O Christ, Thou fountain of all-atoning pain, give me to drink of those holy waters of grief, dark and sad. Grant that my sins may roll into my memory as the waves of the sea upon a drowning man, till I am engulfed and cry out in agony: "Save me, O Lord, for the waters have come in even unto my soul" (Ps. lxxviii. 2). Rescue Thou me from my grief by Thy right hand of pardon. In truth nothing is more common among fairly good Christians

than defective penance. Penance of the penetrating quality is a plain mark of perseverance.

Nor should one forget in connection with penance the avoidance of evil associations as a good omen. When our Savior cast out a devil from an unfortunate young man, He threatened the unclean spirit, saying to him: "Thou deaf and dumb spirit, I command thee, go out of him; and enter no more into him" (Mark iv. 24). Go out and stay out! O how necessary the last part of this loving assistance is to the first.

The veneration of the saints is another mark. What of filial trust in Mary's intercession? The whole world of devout Catholics know its validity and have enjoyed its sweetness. Nor should deep flowing love for any saint or angel be rated less than a mark of predestination, giving preference to our guardian angel and patron saint. We will even affirm the same of religious loyalty to a spiritual director, a kindred spirit who is calm, wise and devout.

Two tests, however, are essential everywhere. One is that laid down by the Council of Trent, voicing the Apostle's teaching. To begin with you must establish such a manner of life as "that by good works you may make sure your calling and election. For doing these things, you shall not sin at any time" (2 Peter i. 10). The second brings us back to the love of God, cherished in this same environment of good works: "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John xiv. 15). Love for Christ our Lord and our God is the quality to be added to everything which makes for good living and happy dying. Take an illustration. Good, hard brick makes a firm wall; yet each brick was once nothing but soft clay, full of water and moulded any way you like. Why is it now so hard, lasting against storm and stress forever? Fire has gone through it, fire has burnt it solid as a stone. So the fire of the love of God must go through your every virtue; faith and hope, obedience and humility and prayer, devotion to angels and saints, loyalty to Church and clergy, nay even the use of the sacraments must



be permeated with love: "If a man should give the whole substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing" (Cant. viii. 7).

When an artist has finished a picture he next gives attention to where it shall be hung in the picture gallery. For, he says, it must be placed in the right light for the best effects, front or side light, bright or dim light. Well, and what is the right light in which to exhibit our daily works of virtue? Is it the noonday glare of health, the golden beams of prosperity? Is it not rather the twilight of our last hours? How many of the world's masters, after a long career of power and glory, have died miserably, as weary in spirit as they were broken in body. How seldom is the death of a great man a great death. On the other hand, the noblest hour of every good Christian is his farewell hour on earth. An ordinary hero says of a desperate venture: "I will succeed or perish in the attempt." But the hero of Christ says: "I will succeed *and* perish in the attempt."

Amen! How many times does Holy Church bid us add this word when we have done our prayers; the last word of all, the word of perseverance. Amen! So be it! Every desire of my heart, so be it constant towards God to the end; every pang of sorrow for sin, so be it palpitating in my soul to the end; every feeling of love for friend and foe, so be it warm in my heart with God's love to the end. I say Amen! to each and all of my acts of religion, Amen! unto final perseverance.



## XXXIX.

### TILL THE SHADOWS RETIRE.

ACCORDING to Fénelon, the validity of our spiritual state depends on our answers to the following questions: Do I love to think of God? Am I willing to suffer for God? Does my desire to be with Him destroy my fear of death?

There is no variance in the teachings of spiritual writers, that holiness of life and willingness to die are inseparable dispositions, forming that character who "shall not be confounded when he shall speak to his enemies in the gate" of death (Ps. cxxvi. 5).

Of the death of a just man it has been said, that it is a door which is iron on one side and gold on the other side—that heavenly side, where Christ and His angels attend the entrance of those who die happy. Well may we honor death, for it emancipates our love of divine things from the deceits of transitory things: death is freedom final and perfect from all delusions. It is a token of love; it is a witness of final perseverance in love; it pays love's debt, being the one perfect atonement for the injury love has suffered by sin.

As our years go onward the fruit of life ripens whilst the leaves decay, and death strips the tree of mortal things and garners our eternal merits from the bosom of God.

Thus death has a joyous aspect, nay, it is the all-joyous entrance to eternal joy. St. Paul cried out: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. i. 21); and again when suffering from the plots of enemies: "From henceforth let no man be troublesome to me; for I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body" (Gal. vi. 17), meaning that the Lord's death wounds were shown forth by the Apostle's mortified bodily frame, just as the death of Jesus was the constant theme of his discourses. With many good Christians the whole fear of God is fear of death, a

sentiment corrected by St. Francis de Sales thus: "I beseech you for the honor of God, my child, not to be 'afraid' of God, for He does not wish to do you any harm" (*Letters to Persons in the World*, Mackey, p. 295). Meanwhile deep-seated fear of God is quite consistent with not being afraid of death. If death has its terrors, they are not for a soldier of Jesus Crucified. The noblest courage of life is shown in facing death unflinchingly.

What is the Christian Church? An institution founded by God to show forth a death. What death? The death that goes before life eternal, that of God at Jerusalem. To show forth that death for how long? Till all men each in turn shall have died. To show it forth to whom? To all mankind, in every corner of the world, in every death-chamber in the world, so that, as the Apostle teaches, being dead with Christ we may "live also together with Christ" in heaven for all eternity (Rom. vi. 8). Hence the dearest wisdom of the Catholic Church is the lesson of a happy death, a wisdom never out of season. For if there is the greatest need of hope in the closing period of a Christian's life—despondency is in the very air of those twilight hours—yet most aged Christians face death without flinching. And there are some temperaments which even in the buoyant years of youth tremble at the thought of death. To young and old the practice of Catholic virtue brings courage to face our inevitable foe, come he early or late, sudden or with timely warnings.

We are men of Christ's divine faith. We are enrolled among the living by the death of Christ. It cannot be that we shall tremble at death, since God forbid that we should glory in anything save in the cross, the death-gibbet of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. vi. 14). Therefore, St. Philip Neri says that "the true servants of God take life patiently and death eagerly."

St. Cyprian, discoursing of true Christian learning, points to the martyrs as holding its highest diploma, saying that "they knew not how to dispute, but they knew how to die." Every Christian may win the premium of a happy death, even though the little catechism is the limit of his learning. Better still is

the thought that love, the easiest of virtues because the sweetest, challenges all the terrors of the last passage, "for strong as death is love" (Cant. viii. 6).

We know that each of us has ever at his side a close companion of the heavenly kind, our angel guardian. But how vivid a contrast between his life and mine. He drinks of the waters of life at the very fountainhead and in overflowing abundance; I only in little sips, and with a hand that tremblingly spills those precious drops of divine inspiration. He lives upon Godlike food, nay, he is forever eating and drinking of the celestial food that veritably is God Himself; I only occasionally partake of God in Holy Communion, and then with taste already sated with carnal banquets, my usual food being the dust of the earth, sauced with sin's ugly, gluttonous hunger. He lives unchangeably alive with divine vitality, and I live a life slowly rotting away, doomed finally to be changed into the earth that I live by and that I so fondly love. To my life the light of the sun is all my light, and I shall be deprived of even that, and my eyes shall one day gaze at the noonday sun and see only black darkness. How different from me art thou, and how much more happy thy lot, O my good angel. And yet I have one privilege which thou hast not: *I can die*. In that privilege I am closer to thy divine King than thou art. I can say what thou canst not: "With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Gal. ii. 19). He is thy King, indeed, and yet thou canst not say as I can: "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (John xi. 16). I had rather be a man whose lot is with Jesus dead and buried, than an angel who cannot taste death nor the grave.

St. Teresa says that "life is to live in such a way as not to be afraid to die" (*Foundations*, xxvii., 10). Nor does readiness to die here and now undervalue the self-distrust about future temptations, which has the effect of concentrating one's efforts on the present religious opportunities. This day at least is mine. Humbly and confidently I pass its hours, perform its duties, offer up its sufferings. To do this and to do it fairly well for one

day is not difficult, but it is enough to comfort my mind concerning the day of death, be it near or far. If I do well to-day I have no mental energies to waste on misgivings about to-morrow. What is now to-day, was to-morrow a few hours ago. And that day of my life whose morrow shall be eternity, shall be controlled by the momentum of an interior habit of resting in thoughts of God. Therefore does the Apostle boast: "We had in ourselves the answer of death, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, Who raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. i. 9).

He that is at ease in the interior ways of God, steps forth gladly into the way of death. He that loves no person or thing save only in the order of reason and of grace, soon learns thus to go on and ever on until death. "Thy testimonies have become exceedingly credible; holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, unto length of days" (Ps. xcii. 5).

St. Thomas Aquinas was asked on his deathbed how to become perfect. He answered: "Walk faithfully in God's presence, always be ready to give Him an account of thy actions as at the point of death." God and death are the names of the teacher and the lesson in the school of life. It is related in the *Life of Mother Margaret Mary Hallahan*, that there was a little boy in her orphan asylum who was very pious, praying fervently and intelligently at the age of even four years. Before he reached five he died, and as he was judged too young to receive Holy Communion, the Sisters requested the bishop to give him confirmation. He was told he could take another name on receiving the sacrament, that of some saint whom he especially loved. "Then," said he, "let me take God for my new name, for there is nobody I love like Him." And if he could not have that incommunicable name in life, yet his innocent soul received it after death, for the holy chrism placed him among those who "shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads" (Apoc. xxii. 4).

Among the last words of St. Teresa were these: "I am a child of the Church." She offered her death as witness of her



fidelity to the Catholic Church, the Spouse of Christ. Our Lord's words to Pilate show how He valued His death as a token of faithfulness to truth: "For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth" (John xviii. 37)—this in answer to the Jews' clamors for His crucifixion; and of the Eucharist, His death's universal and perpetual memorial, He says: "This is the New Testament in My blood" (Luke xxii. 20).

God exacts this evidence of allegiance from all, for all must die, and without this we should fall short of a perfect quittance of our obligation to manifest our loyalty. Suppose that you could be exempted from death. You would be not only separated from the lot of Jesus Christ and His saints, but you would appear before Him empty of the best credentials for Paradise. Without presenting this crucial test you would be ashamed to enter heaven, which is the abode of men and women who know Christ in His glory, because they have been "made conformable to His death" (Phil. iii. 10). Love, whose last word is spoken in death, is most truly eloquent when its pulpit is fixed at the eternal parting of the ways. The golden age of our religion was when men and women on quitting paganism prepared for martyrdom; an era of death witnessing to Christ and His truth, as the usual Christian condition.

The Psalmist's saying, "Precious in the sight of God is the death of His saints" (Ps. cxv. 15), is a revelation of the benignant Father receiving into His bosom the heroic soul of His beloved child. But, in a sense, the death of a penitent sinner, even one but newly changed from foe to friend, is divinely precious. Whatever else was lacking the good thief, he had his death to offer to the Father in union with that of the Only-begotten. Whosoever can present to God the supreme atonement of death, is not to be disheartened by the remembrance of a whole lifetime crowded with foulest iniquities. Even if his death be the consequence, nay the very penalty of his crimes, if he be but truly contrite his death chamber shall resound with



the eternal promise of Calvary: "This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise" (Luke xxiii. 43).

All this helps to answer a palpable difficulty: How can I offer my death to God as a ransom since I must perforce pay it as a debt? The solution is this: By my death I give in love what I might give in hate. Take an illustration of each sort of death, one of hate and one of love. Julian, the Apostate, having spent his whole reign endeavoring to destroy the worship of Christ in the Roman Empire, came to His death from a Parthian arrow. Sinking upon the ground, he saw his life-blood leaping forth from the wound, and with his remaining strength he cast it in handfuls into the air, exclaiming to Christ in despair and defiance: "O Galilean, Thou hast conquered." Francisco Pizarro was one of the cruelest of mankind, a murderer by system, who consummated a career of human slaughter by putting the Inca to death against his plighted word. Broken at last in health, and touched by divine grace, surrounded by traitors whom he had enriched by his blood-stained booty, he was suddenly set upon by his treacherous followers and assassinated. He fought hard for his life, but at last he sank down. Then, knowing his end had come, he dabbled his hand in his blood, and with it made a large cross on the ground, and murmuring a prayer to God for pardon, he fell over upon that cross of his own blood and expired.

A wife gives her husband a birthday present. She bought it with his money, for is not all that she has given her by him? Yet it is really a gift to him and a most welcome one. Though wholly his property by original ownership, yet now she has made it infinitely more so by making it a token of her affection. Such is the relation of a Christian to God in saying to his heavenly Father with Jesus Crucified: "Father into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Luke xxiii. 46).

Thus the sadness of my last hours is cheered by my power to make my death agony a token of immortal love. I can unite it to that of Jesus Christ by a prerogative granted me at my

first presentation to Him by my Mother, the Catholic Church: "Know you not that all we, who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized in His death?" (Rom. vi. 3.) As our Savior went to His death by the will of His Father, and yet offered Himself on the cross because He willed it and not otherwise (Is. liii. 7), so likewise am I free to die, and yet powerless to escape death. Christ is my fellowman, my fellow-ransomer, my partner in the barter of mortality for immortality; and from His super-abundance of liberty and of obedience unto death I will freely draw. I desire to die the kind of death the Lord wills rather than any other, His time rather than earlier or later, accepting all the pains cheerfully in stated preference to their absence. I thus give my death its moral quality; it is all I can give, but it is much.

In no way can the clamor of divine justice within us be hushed so quickly as by the offer to die. I am a sinner, and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. vi. 23). I must accept my deserts. An honest man gladly parts with hard-won money to pay a just debt, because it settles his conscience, on which he depends for his happiness. So do we look forward to pay the "debt of nature," corrupt nature. All life is a debtor's prison, not without solace, but never without the chafe of the body upon the soul. Our bodily frame is our prison cell. The dust placed on our heads by Holy Church on Ash Wednesday is gathered from the withered forms of the countless sinners who have gone before us, as ours shall be gathered in turn and sprinkled upon our successors. Such thoughts give a gloomy view of life, but only for a time, for they indicate unerringly the actual relation of life to death in a sin-stricken race; and once they become familiar, they lead us habitually to reckon exclusively with the immortal things of our destiny. The vast bulk of Christians are penitents, and their only really great gift to God is their death. And it approaches nearest to an adequate gift, for the sinner of longest years, whose foulness has smirched his whole life from his infantile furies till his

gray-haired lust. Repenting at the eleventh hour, he is wholly comforted to be able to say: I can yet die for my outraged Redeemer, with Him, and on account of Him. This is infinitely better than the millionaire's legacy to charity, paid to God after its owner can no longer enjoy it. Life is greater than money. Death is an offering of supreme greatness. We cannot pay God money any more than we can feed Him with bread. Says the Lord to faithless Israel: "If I should be hungry I would not tell thee, for the world is Mine and the fulness thereof" (Ps. xlix. 12). And yet alms given to God's poor are for the remission of sins (Tob. xii. 9). How much more the whole substance of our life's house in the offering up of death.

An illustration of this is shown by the custom of devout souls secretly offering themselves up to immediate death—an oblation not seldom accepted by heaven—for the conversion of some well-loved friend whose career points to an evil end. And, indeed, with what other intention than this, made universal, did Jesus Christ die on Calvary?

## XL.

### EARTH AND HEAVEN.

A SINGULAR life is this: we are to labor with eager interest in the present whirl of existence to save our souls; many of us are further called to strive with all our might to seek and save the souls of others. And yet we are to make our own the restless longing of the Apostle to quit this life: "Having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, a thing by far the better" (Phil. i. 23): a desire to see God in unveiled splendor, and in perfect and final beatitude. My Redeemer bore my sins; in my very name and in my very stead He suffered that I might "reign together with Him" (2 Tim. ii. 12) in realms of eternal bliss. He called me and He knew me personally at my birth (Rom. viii. 30), and in my baptism, and for me He set apart a seat in His Paradise above. "If thou believe, thou shalt see the glory of God" (John xi. 40). But do we thus efficaciously believe? Sometimes we forbode a bad death, we fear the pirates who usually wait to attack ships when on the return voyage laden with precious freight. "The devil," says St. Chrysostom, "when he sees that a soul has gathered great spiritual riches by prayer and sacraments, by chastity and alms deeds and all other virtues, a vessel now full of rich treasures, attacks it and every way strives to capture it at the end of life's voyage." Most truly said. But what pirate can overcome Christ, our Shipmaster? Trustfulness in our Lord's promises is one of the bright lights seen through the mists of death. Once St. Matilda was praying for a nun of her community who was dying. Our Savior appeared to the Saint and said: "What mariner is there, who, after he had brought a rich cargo of goods into port, would throw them all overboard into the sea?" Jesus is that mariner, my immortal soul is the cargo, Holy Church is the ship, hell is the sea.

Our sailing orders bid us look towards the harbor's mouth at every hour of the day or night. Life and death are our watchwords, and they are thus related to each other in the divine categories: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Apoc. ii. 10). We have all heard of the menacing inscription on a gravestone: "What thou art I once was; what I am, thou shalt be." Just as truly may the sweet tones of a departed friend a joyful voice from the skies, speak to us from the bright company of the angels: "What thou art I once was; what I am thou shalt be." Until death is known as the near approach of everlasting happiness, it is not understood in the Christian sense, nor does its thought rightly intensify our purposes. "Remember," says St. Francis de Sales, "what I am accustomed to say: we shall never spend one good Lent as long as we expect to make two. Let us make this as the last, and we shall make it well" (*Letters to Persons in the World*, Mackey, p. 278).

St. Bernard, while in a sort of trance, seemed to see the devil accusing him. To the evil one's charges he made answer: "I confess myself most unworthy of the glory of heaven, and that I can never obtain it by my own merits. But my Lord possesses it by a double title; that of natural inheritance, being the Only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father; and that of purchase, He having bought it by His Precious Blood. This second title He has transferred to me; and upon this right I hope, with an assured confidence, to obtain it through His adorable Passion and His mercy." By this plea the perverse accuser was put to flight. A penitent soul may thus address his judge: Lord, I do not deny, for I cannot, that I am the greatest sinner in the United States; but Thou art the greatest Pardoners in the whole universe.

It is the interest, the joy, the triumph of Jesus to save me. And I? Shall it not be my interest, my joy, my triumph to be saved? If my tendency to evil discourages me; my knowledge of hell, my appreciation of heaven, my tendency to love Jesus Crucified, all hearten me. No gambler ever staked his whole fortune



on so desperate a wager as Jesus, when He flung His Life into the game of my salvation—shall I cause Him to suffer forfeit? O God, my God, how shall I honor Thee? The answer from heaven is: Do not distrust Me. Even in its human aspect and as a natural virtue, hopefulness is exceedingly attractive, and we find light-hearted and trustful natures universal favorites. A confiding spirit may sometimes be deceived; but he is steadfastly loved; trust for trust is the common barter of the commerce of souls. If a confiding character has also commanding ability, he is acclaimed the champion of the weak, and the captain of the embattled hosts of a righteous cause. Who follows a morose man gladly, even if he be a genius? Distrustful characters are essentially selfish, and the atmosphere of acquisitiveness is repulsive. On the other hand, a sanguine temperament quickly takes on a kindly spirit toward others, and readily draws them to him. To such a soul suspiciousness is not so much a defect as a crime.

“O that God may take us from this world,” once exclaimed a holy man, “or take this world from us by detachment; may He make us die, or else make us love His death better than our own poor life.” Herein he stated the reason of life’s hardness to the nobler class of spirits—the thought of heaven. And indeed the journey from nothing to everything must be a hard road and a long one. But what matters it how much I suffer, if I tread the path that leads to eternal peace. As men are glad to cross stormy oceans to better their material condition, a thousand times more glad are the wiser Christians to embark on a life of piety, for it is the divine venture for heaven’s shores. St. Aloysius, though he had but just begun his life, “was overwhelmed with joy” when he found that he had caught the fever then so fatal in Rome. Yet how few would be glad to die even after a most worthy communion, though they could not doubt that their death would then be surely a happy one—it is almost universally an heroic act to cherish, like St. Teresa,

The yearning hope to break away  
From this my prison house of clay.

On the other hand it was esteemed heroic in St. Ignatius to be willing to live on for the sake of saving men's souls, although it was revealed to him that by death heaven's glories were certain to be his. Such spirits estimate joy in life and in death by Calvary's standards, whose Hero died in the moment of victory and yet amid the supreme agony of defeat. All roads that lead to eternal joy pass over Calvary.

It is often said to one devoutly seeking spiritual direction: Do now what you would be glad of having done when you are in heaven. So our Master bade us pray to His Father: "Thy Will be done on earth as it is done in heaven" (Matt. vi. 10). O what joy! God has given me grace to accept shame for His Son's sake, and now I rejoice for it and shall rejoice in all eternity. "It is good for me that thou hast humbled me, that I may learn Thy justifications" (Ps. cxviii. 71). That shame has become my glory. That shame has taught me to love the bruised Heart of my Savior, and now I am a partaker of Its divine happiness. St. Peter exhorts us: "If you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice that when His glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter iv. 13). And our Savior Himself promises: "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy" (John xvi. 20). How precious is that sorrow which is turned into so great a joy as heaven. How truly does Holy Church apply to the Mother of Sorrows the words of the prophet: "O Virgin daughter of Sion. . . . great as the sea is thy destruction" (Lam. ii. 13)—an ocean of sorrow turned into an ocean of joy in Paradise.

Such thoughts as these help us to make little of the honors of this life. St. Philip Neri was several times requested by the Pope to accept the high dignity of Cardinal, and always refused. His prime motive was revealed when an intimate friend begged him to accept for the sake of his Congregation of the Oratory. The Saint answered by taking off his biretta and, looking up reverently and affectionately towards the skies, he exclaimed: "O Paradise! O Paradise!" How well that obstinate man knew

the meaning of St. Paul's teaching: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. xv. 58).

Many think that purgatory will be like heaven to them, since then the dreadful risk of sin will be over. But purgatory is only heaven's novitiate. It is also the debtor's prison, wherein we are made ready for that blissful condition which includes the sense of payment in full of all the divine demands upon us: heaven will be the sweeter on account of purgatory. And most sweet indeed if we can look back to this life as a self-chosen debtor's prison, a purgatory of our own making, where, with hard thrift of virtue, we have made even with God's stern justice.

"God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. ix. 7), a willing payer of debts of penance and atonement. Absolute freedom, indeed, is never vouchsafed in this life; but the nearest approach to it is the Christian's anticipation of God's day of reckoning, saying: Why wait till the last moment, since my debt to God is so just, and my heart is stirred with so strong a desire to be at quits with Him now. When I have my choice to hasten or to tarry in dealing with God, the better way is the heavenly one. In heaven—let us bear it in mind—freedom is at home and is perfect. How great is that freedom which knows no law because it needs it not, where proof is made of the Apostle's meaning: "Knowing this, that the law is not made for the just man" (1 Tim. i. 9). How glorious is the law of heaven, which is supremely well obeyed and yet never commands! In this world our obedience is not that of heaven, absorbed wholly in love. It is the painful monotony of ever-recurring tasks hard to flesh and blood, harder yet to the uprising of pride. But the steadfastness of grace is ours, and the example of Christ, Who when close to the end exclaimed to heaven: "Father, I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (John xvii. 4). O how sublime! My preparation for heaven must be on that pattern. The finish-

ing of the work God gave me to do is my purgatory, either now or after death.

Purgatory is moreover the graduate school of love. It hinders the shame an imperfect soul would feel if thrust prematurely into heaven, the abode of the perfect. St. Paul tells of the heavenly Jerusalem as the company of many thousands of the angels and the Church of the firstborn, and of the unveiled presence of God, the Judge of all, and the fellowship of "the spirits of the just made perfect" (Heb. xii. 23). The love that rules in such a company is deep-searching, and wisely may a Christian soul crave a final cleansing before venturing in, saying to the Son of God: "Lord, Thy love is too strong for me as yet. When after my happy death Thine eyes greeted me, they blinded me with their searching love. When Thy hand clasped mine it broke my bones with its eager love. When Thou didst press me to Thy heart, its love burnt me most painfully. Ah, dear Jesus, Thou must let me devote some time to the further practice of holy love, so that little by little I may grow used to such strong love as thine!"

What, after all, is the highest praise of God's law? That it is identical with God's love. What, then, should be my submission to God's law but the constant increase of His love in me; this is my true life, of which our Savior said: "I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly" (John x. 10). The Apostle's saying is the proper gloss for this promise of life: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. i. 21)—gain, because dying here means the beginning of a divinely abundant life in heaven. There we have supreme and universal life, the originating and actuating principle of all existence. There we live in perfect gladness that God is our loving Father, that He is our loving Redeemer, that He has espoused our souls to His Holy Spirit.

The sum of our soul's life is longing and trustfulness: longing for God's joy, trustfulness that in due season He will bestow it upon us. Our Savior in distinguishing between God's lesser and greater gifts, says: Rejoice not in this, that spirits are sub-



ject to you, but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven" (Luke x. 20). By our longing for this our own hand writes God's name deep in our hearts, a sign manual of love; and, simultaneously, in the book of life our name is written by Jesus Christ, His record of having won our love. Love, true personal love, cannot be devoid of feeling; it is a sentiment though it be sprung from conviction. We cannot love anyone heartily, and not feel tenderly towards him. Be conscious of that feeling toward your Redeemer in Bethlehem, and on Calvary, and on the Altar, and in the Sacrament of Penance, and you have written His name in your soul, and He has inscribed yours in heaven.

But you must approve your inner adhesion to Him by outward good deeds; you must make this feeling victorious in the conflict, so inevitable, so bitter, with baser sentiments. Jesus is the truest friend ever known. The foremost excellence of a friend is that he is steadfast. O Jesus, of Thee it is written: "God is faithful" (1 Cor. x. 13), and I humbly trust that as Thou art now my friend, as I am Thine, so Thou wilt continue to the end and into the ages of blissful Eternity. Solomon said to Thee of his Temple: "Building, I have built a house for Thy dwelling, to be Thy most firm throne forever" (3 Kings viii. 13). Yet it was only a house of earth that crumbled and vanished away. But I have built Thee a house of love in my immortal soul; shalt Thou not make it Thy throne forever? Shalt Thou not be true to our mutual plighted love, and help me in my moments of weakness, my direst hour of temptation—shalt Thou not be steadfast and make me steadfast to the end? "O Lord God, in Thee have I put my trust; save me from all them that persecute me; and deliver me" (Ps. vii. 2).

The beloved disciple's vision of heaven tells of God's making His celestial home ours by the mighty fiat of His love: "And I, John, saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice from the throne saying: Behold the



tabernacle of God with men, and He will dwell with them. And they shall be His people, and God Himself with them shall be their God" (Apoc. xxi. 2, 3). How great is God's love of this earth, since it impels Him to make heaven and earth one for His own gratification. How great is even my love, since it is strong enough to draw down God and all His angels to dwell with me. "Canst not Thou then, O my God," exclaims Blessed John of Avila, "be happy without me, that my love for Thee should draw Thee down to me?" God's love for us is inspired not by our worthiness so much as by His own tender compassion for us. When anyone loves another he wants to continue to love him. So God when He loves me wants to keep on loving, for whosoever is worth loving at all is worth loving forever. God's present love for me means His purpose to love me eternally in heaven.

Even if God meant to give the same reward hereafter to those who suffer willingly for His sake, and those who do not, we ought still to choose suffering for our lot, were it only to be like Jesus Crucified and lovingly to bear Him company.

Grace is sometimes defined to be a pure divine excitement. Our dignity, when we are in a state of grace, is in itself a twilight glory of heaven's meridian splendor, for the grace of God is His blessed Spirit dwelling within us in the peace and joy of a welcome guest (Rom. xiv. 17). "Both in Holy Scripture and in the writings of the Fathers, Christian men are styled regenerated, new creatures, partakers of the divine nature, children of God, godlike. . . . Now this wonderful union, which is properly called the indwelling of God, differs only in degree or state from that with which God beatifies the saints in heaven" (Leo XIII., *Encyclical on the Holy Ghost*, May 9, 1897). The perfection of this blessedness on earth is felt in those intervals, truly heavenly, when God's thoughts are ours, since we then feel that His nature, so wise, so good, so true, has become ours. We have only to add the clear vision of Him to elevate our souls to His joy in heaven.

To the divine elation of a fervent life will then be added the crowning grace of final perseverance: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Apoc. ii. 10). Sin haunts me now; the very risk I run of falling away from God sickens me, terrifies me. In heaven I shall be incapable of sin. O what a dignity, what a joy! Is not all this enough to cause us to live, as it were, within easy reach of the portals of Paradise? If we ask Holy Church: What does God give by divine grace? she answers: He gives what a Godlike generosity calls for, He gives Himself in essence and presence and love dwelling within us; in heaven He gives the same except with a more overflowing fulness. He is infinite wisdom; in heaven "we shall see Him as He is" (1 John iii. 2), for "God hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter, ii. 9). No wonder that the nearer the saints came to death, the quicker was the response of their faith to God's promise of heaven. Shortly before he died, St. John of the Cross said, as he heard the convent bell ringing for midnight office, "I will sing matins in heaven to-morrow," and expired.

Alban Butler says that we must so plant and cultivate the seeds of supernatural virtues in our souls, "that they may be converted into nature, and be the principle by which all the affections of our souls and all the actions of our lives are governed." That is a strong expression, "converted into nature," and it is used to show that in the life of grace a divine force absorbs our human powers. So that what nature is to the springs of conduct in ordinary men, grace becomes in the lives of good Christians. Perseverance can hardly be counted on otherwise than by entire absorption in God, to end in what the Apostle speaks of as heaven's transfiguring influence upon us: "We all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. iii. 18).

Towards this end every virtuous impulse reaches forth, the sweetness of its inward joy creating an appetite for more

virtue. Thus, for example, to say one fervent prayer is to long to say another. Thus God's friendship is soon made a chain of devout acts, inner and outer, all binding us closer and closer to our blessed destiny. Thus it is that earth is riveted to heaven.









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